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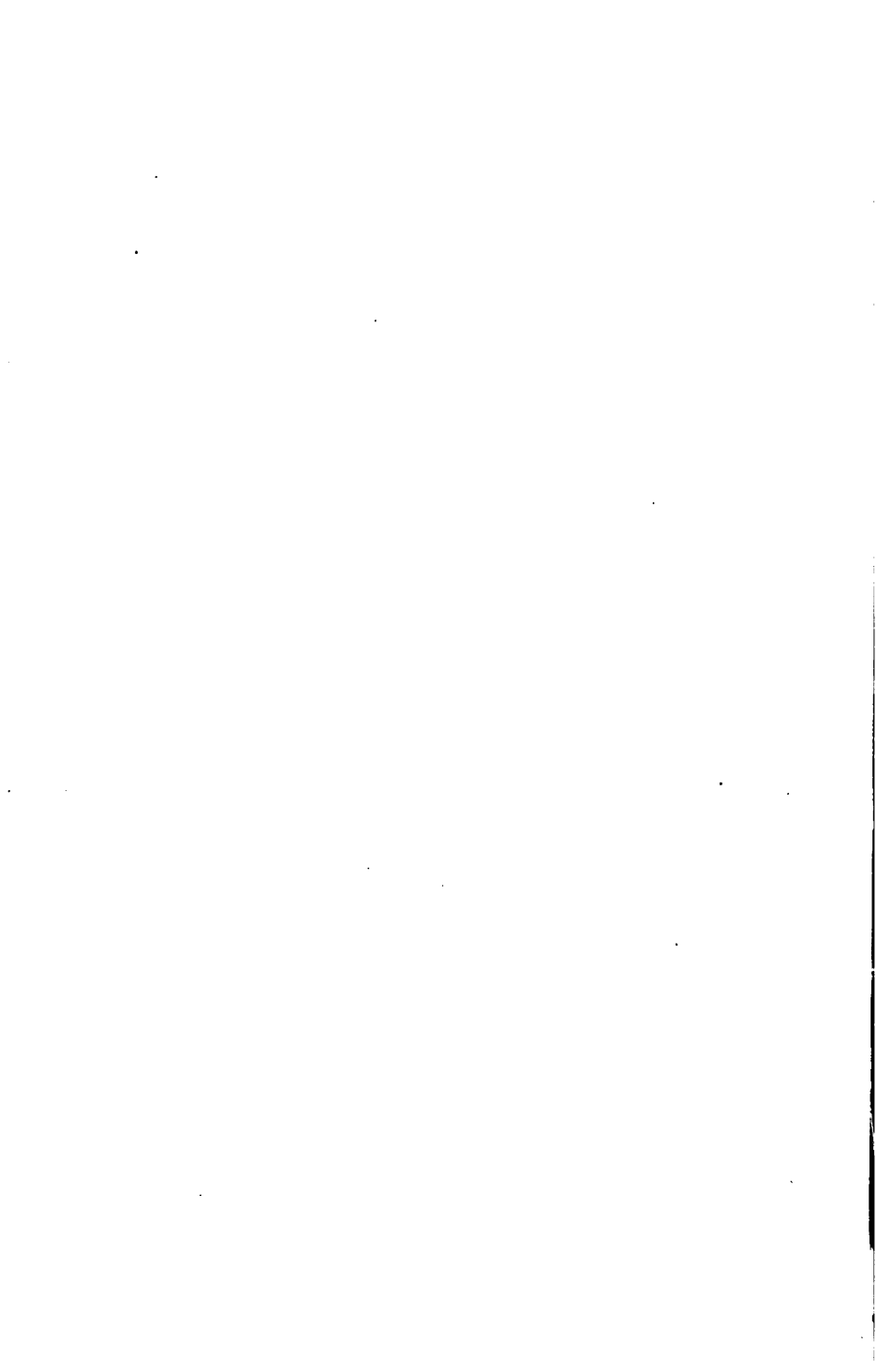
High Life

Harrison Rhodes





M.
Rhodes



HIGH LIFE
And Other Stories



HIGH LIFE

And Other Stories

BY

HARRISON RHODES

Author of "American Towns and People"



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HIGH LIFE

CHAPTER I

“THE *Lac des Alpes* is very blue, Papa, is it not?” remarked the Princess Lydia, standing at the broad French window that looked out upon the terrace of the villa and upon the lake below.

“It is blue,” replied His Late Royal Highness Georges IV of Constantia-Felix, with a laugh, “but it is not so blue as most of us who have come to live near it are.”

The witticism, if it be that, was not one of his most famous. But it was not lacking in a certain gallantry, in the circumstances.

The conversation was in English. When old Charles of Constantia had been a boy the royal family had always spoken French—it was a tradition from the days when the Margrave of Beyreuth, sister of Frederick of Prussia, naturally wrote all her letters and her memoirs in that tongue. But even as far back as Georges’ boyhood the British governess and tutor had begun to invade the courts of Continental Europe and by the time Lydia was growing up English had become the commonest language of royal interiors.

There was of course the Constantian dialect, which

chauvinistic Constantians tried to pretend was a language. But it had never had great vogue in the palace at Lichtenmont. In the northwestern province, old Constantia, some of His Royal Highness's subjects spoke German. But then, as Georges once lightly said to an American lady at Cannes, one so rarely spoke to one's subjects. In any case, he had further explained, too many Prussians employed the language ever to make it a gentleman's tongue. He had taken something of this snobbish tone in 1914. Whatever his subjects' feelings may or may not have been, Constantia-Felix had not entered the war on the German side. Neither had it gone with the Allies; indeed it was, at the end, although a very tiny one, almost the only neutral in Europe. Its geographical situation permitted this, as you can easily see by studying the map. The Constantians, however, though they had been kept out of war, were determined not to be deprived of all its pleasures. There was a charming little revolution at Lichtenmont, and the Royal family of Constantia-Felix was now but lately installed in the Chateau Branchazay.

It was really nothing but a villa, but the best the real estate agent at Geneva could manage to find. The real estate agent at Geneva, although deeply sensible of the honor, etc., had been pestered to death lately with exiled royal families and their demands. He was excessively grateful to the late Majesty of Constantia-Felix when he expressed himself contented with Branchazay. There were two bathrooms, one with a shower, and a lovely view, just as the agent had pointed out.

The views almost anywhere along the *Lac des Alpes* are lovely, although it may be doubted how beautiful any landscape in a republic would look to a royal eye under ordinary circumstances. But circumstances are no longer ordinary anywhere in the world and Switzerland may to many now represent peace and safety.

The view from the terrace at Branchazay was in any case almost intensively royal. On a slight promontory off to the right was Heinrich Albert of Bavaria's place, and beyond what had already come to be known as Balkan Bay. The southeast-of-Europe monarchs were modest in their demands (especially as to bathrooms, so the rumor at Geneva went), but they quite insisted on being near enough each other to quarrel comfortably. There was a peculiarly hideous grayish battlemented structure just discernible farther east, which might have looked well in Berlin. And from the terrace at Branchazay you could see the *châteaux* of at least three Princes of Illyria, representing the somewhat feverish condition of that lovely but unhappy country during only the last ten years. One of these princes was provided with a legitimate consort from the usual small German state; one was entertaining on an almost unnecessarily prolonged visit a Parisian actress; and the third, a fat jovial soul, had already, morganatically of course, married his cook.

If we may, at the very outset of our narrative, postponing any further comment upon the color of the *Lac des Alpes*, consider a little further the case of this Stefan, the reader will perhaps understand more

clearly to what vicissitudes royalty in the summer of 1920 is exposed. Considering the acuteness of the servant problem in Switzerland and the doubtful future of royal exchequers, it at first was generally felt that Stefan the Eighteenth had done well in mating, although the cook was indeed quite as plain as any German princess could have been. But exactly two days after having (morganatically) approached the altar, Madame la Comtesse de Savarin, as she had now become in the Illyrian nobility, deserted the kitchen for the drawing-room and proceeded thereafter to discharge the most expensive male chefs whom the wretched Prince of Illyria could induce to come from Paris at the rate of about one a week, knowing them, as well she might, for wasteful and incompetent.

"What will you?" cried Stefan to the other Princes of Illyria, with whom he was now quite reconciled. "What was I to expect?" he asked, weeping with the facility of which only fat men in the south of Europe are capable. "I was too ambitious. I tried to marry above me. I beg of you, my brothers, marry your equals, marry some humble princess who knows how few rights and how little money royalty to-day has."

Georges of Constantia had said once, standing on his terrace at Branchazay and viewing the houses of the exiled colony, that he feared it was going to prove a very mixed society on the *Lac des Alpes*. The speech sounds snobbish, but we must remember that Georges had always, for a king, frequented very good society in London, in Paris, and at Monte Carlo.

We may return now to His Royal Highness's comment upon the blueness of the *Lac des Alpes*.

"When I talk of being blue, Count Churak," he said, addressing an elderly gentleman who stood stiffly in an attitude of attention by the table, "I refer as much to you as to anyone. I think you feel the humiliation of our late unpleasantness in Constantia as much as I do myself."

"If Your Majesty will permit, it may be that I feel it more. Your Majesty has been a king fifteen years. I have been the servant of a king for forty." He bowed low.

"Yes, Churak, I know," said Georges kindly.

"But," went on the old man with a sudden flaring up, "we shall go back, we shall go back soon."

"You think so," murmured his master meditatively and an odd smile, very charming and yet a little sad, flitted over his face. "I'm wondering, Churak."

"Our supporters are active at home."

"They are very generous at least," said His Majesty. "Let us do them justice."

"Papa," said the Princess Lydia, "what do we live on? Your private fortune?"

"Well, my darling, I lived on my private fortune for a long time, and lived very well. Too well, perhaps, if I'd known what was coming. It is no secret from Churak here that at present we are pensioners on the Royalist party."

"I wish, Papa," she said, her face dark, "that I could earn my living."

"Your Royal Highness!" protested the old Churak, horror-stricken. "Such words!—and if I may ven-

ture to remind your Royal Highness, it is not customary for a princess of Constantia-Felix to address her father as papa. She says Your Royal Highness."

"Oh, I don't feel as if I could keep up etiquette here," she protested. She started out of the French window. "I wish," she added with what may seem irrelevancy, "I wish that my waist were not quite so large!"

Her father gazed after her a moment. And there was silence for a moment in the room. It is true that the *Lac des Alpes* is very, very blue. Count Churak was a martinet and silly a good deal of the time. Perhaps now we catch him at one of his best moments.

"Your Royal Highness does mean to go back to Lichtenmont—as king?" he almost pleaded. After all he was faithful, like a dog.

"Oh, as to what I *mean* to do or think I *can* do, Churak—but yes, I should *like* to go back. It occurs to me that I might make a rather better king than before. It is quite possible that in the old days I was too much upon the Riviera. Yes, I'd like to go back, or have my daughter go back. I'd just like them to know that after all we're not quite so bad—" He caught himself as if he were being a little too informal, even for an ex-king. When he spoke his tone was again dry and languid.

"It is quite true, Count Churak, that Her Royal Highness's waist looks too large. Have you noticed it?"

"I shouldn't presume to notice Her Royal Highness's waist," protested the old man. Georges smiled.

"Will you ask my daughter's governess to step here? Now that I am no longer overwhelmed with the cares of state I may as well take up this question. Miss Bidgerton has certainly been most remiss."

Churak went, pausing an instant at the door to look back at his royal master. The old man had never quite approved of Georges, but Georges from boyhood had always had a way with him. For the old man, at least, he had it still. And the Court Chamberlain knew that the king's manner was sometimes more cheerful than the king. As he stopped he saw his master stand a moment gently meditative, almost dreaming, and then suddenly pull himself out of this mood and, advancing to the windows, call the Princess Lydia.

"Come here, my dear," he called. "I want to look at you."

She came in, demurely now. And he inspected her, critically and yet with a more personal air than his daughter was accustomed to with him.

"I don't believe it is the waist," he said at last. "I think it's the frock."

"I know the frock's not—not right," faltered poor Lydia.

"Not right—why, it's abominable!"

"It's as if you'd never noticed my frocks before," insinuated the girl.

He looked vaguely embarrassed.

"It looks almost that way, doesn't it?"

"It's almost as if you'd never noticed me much before, Papa."

He looked intently at her now, and he stiffened a little as he spoke.

"May I venture to ask Your Royal Highness exactly what you mean?"

And the Princess Lydia looked at him, and was frightened at first and then was very brave. She was just eighteen, it must be remembered.

"Papa, now that we're here, it seems as though we were starting everything fresh. This is a new world, isn't it?"

"I constantly read so in the newspapers," murmured her father.

"Papa, in that old world you let me grow up very much alone." She spoke bravely but her lip was quivering, ever so little.

"Did I?" he asked gravely, quite as if he were thinking of it for the first time. "Yes, I suppose I did. But you seemed amply provided for."

"I had Bidgy, of course. She's absurdly old-fashioned and a great goose—"

"My dear, my dear, this of your governess!" he protested under his breath.

"Still she's rather of a darling."

"I confess I shouldn't myself have thought of describing the excellent Miss Bidgerton that way, but I'm glad she is. And then, my dear, there were ladies in waiting, surely?"

"The Countess Torben and the Baroness Roselten!" She spoke the names as if they were in themselves an accusation.

"Well?" he asked. And as she remained grimly silent: "Oh," he said, "you felt that way about those excellent females, too. I didn't realize that." He grinned almost like a boy.

"And of course I went on visits to Aunt Augusta at Berlin."

"Which I certainly didn't."

"And Aunt Charlotte and Cousin Maren came to see me at Lichtenmont. You," she ventured, feeling that now she was beginning to get a little the upper hand of him, "always went to Cannes before they came."

"Indeed I did!" Even now he gave a sigh of relief at the thought that he had missed those ladies.

But now his daughter seemed again to lose the firm tone. Her color grew a little higher. It is hard always to be courageous, at eighteen.

"It wasn't that I meant to blame you, Papa. But please try not to blame me too much if I'm dull."

"Oh, dull—" he protested quickly.

"And dowdy."

"But we're going to change all that—" he cried gayly. "We're much nearer Paris here than we were at Lichtenmont."

"Papa," and she blushed violently at the avowal she was about to make, "what I'd like is to be much nearer *you* than I was at Lichtenmont."

At first he gazed at her gravely, till her blush deepened, and then he smiled, a little tenderly, a little as if he enjoyed her embarrassment. Yet it was one of the moments when unquestionably he had a way with him.

"My dear daughter Lydia," he said, very softly, "you're making a declaration of your affections to me. Do you suppose we are going to be just like ordinary *bourgeois* from now on?"

He put his arms out and for one little instant she nestled there.

"It's not much of an offer, my dear. But if you want a place to lay that yellow head of yours and cry I'll probably be here." And then with a slightly wry smile, "I'll probably be here most of the time from now on."

And then he went on whimsically.

"When," he asked, "did you first realize that you cared for me?"

"Don't tease me, Papa," answered the girl. "For quite a long time really I've thought that you were nice, in spite of the fact that you were probably frivolous and bad."

"In spite of it!" he repeated. "I've often been led to suppose that it was on account of it. But let's not talk about *les beaux jours*, my dear. I'm likely to be less frivolous and bad in the future I'm sure. I'll try to be a little more nice to you. I'll have time. My hair's turning gray. I'm sure the Constantian newspapers will say it happened the night of the Revolution. I think it did, in fact."

There was, for a moment, silence in the room. It is one thing to speak lightly of such matters as a Revolution in a sunlit drawing-room looking out upon the blue lake and the Alps beyond. It had been quite another thing that night, at Lichtenmont, with the mob gathering in the square in front of the palace, the guns

firing in the Victoria suburb, and the taxicab hurriedly brought to the gate of the garden behind. There had been the hurried leave-taking from a few loyal old friends and servants and from some misguided lads in the uniform of the Constantian army who thought, very likely, less of their country than of their king.

Let us by no means exaggerate or be unduly tragic about kings, they are not the only people in the world to whom trouble comes. But Georges IV of Constantia-Felix had, after all, grown up in his country. He had been happy as a boy there, hunting wild boar in the eastern woodlands, and presiding over the destinies of ballet and operetta from the royal *loge*. If he had not deliberately been a good king, neither had he deliberately been a bad one. As he turned to go, perhaps forever, from Constantia-Felix he loved the land. There was an instant when he felt that to stay there he would willingly be a shepherd on its hills. But of course he was what he was and even before he was hustled into the waiting cab he had, on account of its discomforts, decided against the shepherd's life.

"All I can hope," he said to the few who were there to take leave of him, "is that my country may be the happier that I have said good-by to her. The world is strangely altered lately, perhaps sadly—there is an argument that way. At any rate if I can ever come back home to Constantia-Felix I hope it may be because my country will be happier that I greet her once again. I am at this moment more a Constantian than I have ever been before. Good-by."

It was right and just that he should leave Constan-

tia-Felix, but there can now be no great harm in noting that he left it with a pleasant gallantry.

For an instant such memories were in a cloud about these exiles. Then Georges shook them off, passing his hand lightly across his eyes as if to conjure them away. He took up his conversation with his daughter.

"You see, my dear, if any one in the family's to be frivolous and bad in the future it will probably be you."

"I haven't had any training in being frivolous, Papa. If *you'd* ever visited Aunt Augusta—"

"Heaven forbid!" he interrupted her.

"But I warn you, Papa, I shan't probably be frivolous but I'm likely to be bad."

"Are you, my dear?" he asked gravely as if she indeed surprised him.

"Yes," she answered. "Bidgy knows."

"Well, I've sent for Bidgy. I may as well know, too."

He looked at her silently yet smilingly; it seemed a new habit he was acquiring by the *Lac des Alpes*.

She did not look *bad*, so much must be said for the Princess Lydia. And alas! she *did* look dowdy. A philosopher might do well to try to trace the connection between the dull appearance of antebellum princesses and the fact that, according to all the complicated rules for royal alliances, being a prince you had to marry one of them, whether or no. Of course there had been tales of too sensitive heirs to thrones who fainted at the sight of the German royal *fräuleins* chosen to be their queens. But for the most part

wretched young royalty submitted to its fate. What incentive was there for a princess to look pretty, since it would avail her nothing in securing a handsome husband? Viewed in this light the Princess Lydia's new anxiety about her waist might well seem ominous. In this world of 1920, did princesses, too, mean to marry whom they would? And were they meditating pretty frocks and slender waists for this new campaign?

Some such thoughts drifted through King Georges' mind. Yes, it might now be better worth poor Lydia's while to have a waist. Perhaps it would be better worth everybody's while. It must be confessed that he cast a glance at his own reflection in the mirror. In men of forty the waist, too, has its value.

Lydia was dressed in gray, a flannelish kind of material, cut with a plain skirt and a jacket abysmally devoid of style. Her yellow hair might have been pretty, but it was stretched tight away from her forehead and twisted into a close knob at exactly the wrong point upon her head—every woman has exactly that wrong point somewhere. Her blue eyes might have been pretty too, but they had always been too grave, too free from any of the sparkling lights of coquetry. They were childish, frank eyes, with the kind of boldness that goes with simplicity, that goes with it for a little while, thought the king, not wishing to push even a mild cynicism too far. He still looked at his daughter. Yes, she was youth, she was young Europe, she was the future of this odd world. Was he condemned to be only its past? And a past none too creditable, as one viewed it now?

Upon such meditations broke Miss Bidgerton. Already twenty years ago when she went to Florence with the family of the Grand Duke of Lenzenbusch the Italians termed her an *alta sicea*, an old dry one. Did not in her person the whole blameless virginity of England wither upon its stalk? Was she not typical of the whole late Victorian period of British respectability? Had she not, more than even kings and queens, lost the whole world as she had understood it in the spring of 1914?

"Miss Bidgerton," began the king. And at once the poor wretch presented the appearance of being about to burst into tears. Not that Royalties had ever been other than most kind to Miss Bidgerton, so she herself would constantly have told you, recognizing in her not only a clergyman's daughter but a lady. Now, however, any new event seemed to her likely to be a change for the worse. She was in advance prepared for more hideous democratic institutions at every step. And Georges IV of Constantia-Felix she had always secretly distrusted, he seemed so gay.

"Miss Bidgerton, my daughter assures me she is going to be bad."

At first it seemed as if tears would flow. Then all the nipped generations of English governesses rose up behind her, gave her courage. Or did the desperateness of respectability's situation in this new vulgar world inspire her? At any rate when she spoke her voice agreeably rasped the air.

"Going to be bad?" she repeated scornfully. "Does Her Royal Highness consider she's not bad now?"

"Oh, it's only my having ideas, Papa—"

"I'm sure," now wailed Miss Bidgerton, "I never expected that any pupil of mine—"

"Would have ideas?" His Majesty completed her sentence. "Of course not, Miss Bidgerton, of course not," he added soothingly. "I ought perhaps to add that I never expected any daughter of a king—but it wouldn't be quite true. We're more human than people think. But I'm wandering from the subject. Are her ideas very awful?"

"It's all because I told Bidgy this morning that I wished I were an American!" cried the Princess Lydia.

Miss Bidgerton now fairly dissolved in tears.

"Could there be anything worse?" she wailed.

"Let's ask Churak," suggested His Majesty, as the ancient chamberlain entered.

"Could there be anything worse, Churak, than the Princess Lydia's wishing to be an American?"

Count Churak turned red, almost purple. It was quite evident that his first instinctive reply would not have been fit for the ears of ladies. But he mastered himself and his color slightly abated.

"The wish Her Royal Highness has expressed," he began coldly, "is entirely contrary to all court etiquette and tradition."

"That," replied the Princess bluntly, "is why I expressed it. I want to see life for myself, Papa. I've never seen anything for myself. I've never been anything by myself. I want to be just Lydia Brazan-koff, nothing more, nothing less. The revolutionists thought they'd been cheated out of what they wanted in life. Wasn't I being cheated, too?"

In the silence that followed Miss Bidgerton set in

crying with the soft determination with which a steady rain begins.

"You do well to cry, Bidgy," and oddly enough, as she talked in favor of democracy, she looked more like a proud and haughty princess as we are used to think princesses are. "I have not yet told His Majesty the worst."

Georges had pulled himself up. He, too, spoke now more as a king might be expected to speak.

"I think I can perhaps guess the matter over which it is your intention to disagree with me."

"I am no longer a child, Papa."

"You are right," he answered firmly. "You are eighteen and of a suitable age to be married."

"I intend only to marry a man whom I love."

"Then I assume, my dear, that you are already in love with Prince Otto of Hellenos, because it is he whom you are going to marry."

"No, Papa," answered the little Princess Lydia.

"I suggest to Count Churak and Miss Bidgerton that they withdraw. I fear her Royal Highness and I are about to have an unpleasant scene."

CHAPTER II

IT is, of course, sometimes pleasant to record unpleasant scenes. But really no scene could have been very unpleasant with two such pleasant people concerned in it.

The matter of the Princess Lydia's marriage had already been discussed at the council of Montresor. (We shall hear more of this Council of Montresor and it is promised that some disclosures will be made here of a later famous meeting when Colonel House himself was nearly sent for across the Atlantic. Meanwhile the reader is begged to content himself with the present minor international questions. Its members were of course all *ex* rather than reigning kings. Privately they had their own jokes about this. At one stage of the war a famous *bon-mot* had been that soon there would be only seven kings in Europe—those of Spades, Clubs, Diamonds and Hearts, the two of chess and the King of England.) The tiny island, almost the only one in the *Lac des Alpes*, was for a long time the property of the Czarina of all the Russias, who had the smallest white marble villa there, surrounded by a miniature but lovely rose garden from which, across the blue waters, you could look toward the white snows of Mont Blanc. It now serves, or did that summer, as a kind of neutral ground for the meeting of these dethroned gentle-

men who had come to live in its vicinity. The "concert of Europe" one of the Prussians rather pompously termed it—Georges IV, who was more *cosmopolite* and had a lighter touch, thought it perhaps should rather be called *l'orchestre jazz de l'Europe*.

"There can be no question at all," said a bearded Bavarian speaking French—of course all the Germans insisted on speaking French—"there can be no question but that we must be as strict as ever in our alliances. Speaking only for the German people it will soon call us back."

"If the Illyrian people call me back then I must fight with my brothers," cried Stefan the Eighteenth, whose passion for the two other princes of Illyria was now as violent as had earlier been his hate.

"Yes," said the ex-King of Romalia to the first speaker, "and I shall lose the best antagonist at piquet I have yet met."

"I should be at war with you, Heinrich," this from Miguel of Elzenia, "and you are the only one of us who can get any decent beer over the border from Munich."

"Silence," thundered a gentleman who was termed by his fellow exiles—behind his back—the All-Lowest. "God hears us."

"Yes," murmured one of the Archdukes, "it's a pity for some of us he didn't hear *you* earlier."

"He probably did, and was bored," added a mere Hereditary Duke-Palatine.

It was, if a concert, one of some discords. So that though its decision, given in a later calmer moment (after a little beer and Swiss cheese in fact), was that

no *mésalliances* were ever to be permitted in the sacred circle, the question, in so far as it concerns the Princess Lydia, was much more likely to be settled by the unpleasant scene between her and her somewhat volatile parent.

"It isn't altogether complimentary to me, my dear, that you wish you were an American."

"I want to be free, that's all I mean."

"I wonder," he meditated, "if the Americans are so free. However," he went on, "you aren't one. And can't be. Unless you're planning to marry an American. Are you?"

"I'm not planning to marry anybody, Papa." She blushed a little, but she looked angry.

"I suppose there *are* American men," he meditated. "There *must* be. But somehow one never noticed them much before they had an army. They all seemed to be married already in the old days and hard at work at home in New York to support their wives at Cannes."

"You like the wives, don't you, Papa?"

"My dear, you seem to know more of my life upon the Riviera than I had imagined. Yes, I like the American ladies, I won't deny it. But *I* shall not marry an American."

"*You?*" asked Lydia.

"Well, my dear, I'm not so old as to preclude marriage. And you must have realized that for a long time in Constantia they were urging it on me. If not, you'd have been queen some day and though you're much nicer than your cousin Wilhelmina in Holland some people felt prejudiced in favor of a male heir."

"Why didn't you marry again, Papa? Of course you're quite young."

"Why didn't I marry again?" he repeated, and then he smiled and made a very odd speech. "Perhaps it was because, like you, my dear, I couldn't marry an American. Who knows? We can't, my dear. Just now it isn't perhaps very pleasant to be of royal blood, but we are. And we must be faithful to the tradition."

"Do you expect, Papa, ever again to be King of Constantia-Felix?" she asked seriously.

"I *am* King of Constantia-Felix. And you are the Crown Princess!" he answered. "As to whether we ever go back, my dear, I don't know. I wonder. Perhaps they'll want us. And if they do we must be ready. We must not have sullied the tradition. Perhaps they'll want Otto back, after his father dies. And then they'll want him married to you. Think what broad lands Hellenos and Constantia joined together would be."

"Father," said the little Princess Lydia, "I'm very young and I'm not clever. But I can't believe you. You're beautiful, Father, but somehow I know you're—well, what has passed. We're not going back. And if I was ever to go back—as queen—I believe that my Constantian people would be glad that I'd been brave enough to marry, if I ever do marry, for love. Father, I will not marry Prince Otto of Hellenos!"

There was a moment before any one spoke.

"He's very good looking," said Georges in quite a different tone. "Not that that matters, of course."

"Certainly not," said the Princess Lydia most severely.

"And very agreeable. No, I see that doesn't matter either. You're a bad girl, Lydia. But I don't quite see what I can do. This villa is too small to have dungeons. It's unfortunate that Prince Otto is coming over from Villeneuve this afternoon. I suppose you won't even see the creature? No, I thought so. What would you do, my dear, if I tried to insist on your meeting him?"

"I have thought it all out," said Lydia. "I shall go away on a trip, quite *incognita*, with Bidgy. I've packed a bag already."

Georges of Constantia-Felix, if indeed he be the hero of this tale, is not the kind of hero who always meets issues face to face, and conquers. In this present moment he temporized.

"That's all very well," he remarked. "Let us be modern and let us be free by all means. But you'll have a very dull time with Bidgy, and if you'll allow me to say so, if you've packed that bag with clothes similar to what you're now wearing you may as well stay at home."

"We could go to Paris." Lydia was a little plaintive.

"Not under the present passport regulations. Besides if Bidgy chose your clothes you'd only look like the British Royal family. But you could go anywhere in Switzerland. Now really, perhaps, you'd better go, my dear. If you have a thoroughly dull time you'll be far more contented with Branchazay.

And you might even come to like a nice boy like Otto."

"First you didn't want me to go, Papa. Now you behave as if you want to be rid of me. Try to understand—you seemed to be going to only a little while ago. If you were a girl wouldn't you want to have seen something, met some one before you agreed to a husband picked out for you by a lot of funny old exiled kings on an island in the *Lac des Alpes*?"

"Yes," he answered sadly, "I suppose that's what we seem like."

"You know, Papa, I believe we're just like other people now and I think I'm glad. I haven't had such an awfully good time being a princess, Papa—"

"No, I suppose you've been lonely." He took her hand and patted it—a little awkwardly, for, after all, it was a daughter's hand. "And I suppose I've been an exceptionally selfish swine. I wonder if kings were rather like that."

The Princess Lydia patted his hand—a little awkwardly, for, after all, it was a king's.

"You're nicer than you've ever been before, Your Majesty," she avowed shyly.

"And I believe you are, too, Your Royal Highness," he answered.

(Really it can no longer be pretended that it was a very unpleasant scene.)

"Then you'll let me go, Papa?"

"You're being sly, my dear, but yes. I'll let you go."

"And I won't have to marry that Otto of Hellenos?"

"I haven't said that, Lydia. But I'll try, if possible, to have you fall in love with him first. Now

that's all I'll say. And it's more than I ought to say."

"I've got a Baedeker's guide book of Switzerland—" began Lydia.

"I'd advise getting Murray or Joanne," counseled her father. "For a good many years one of the chief objects of life in Europe will be to prevent any one's ever thinking that you could be German."

The scene, now admitted not to be unpleasant, had grown peaceful, when upon it burst Count Churak and Miss Bidgerton, both the prey, so it could be guessed at once, of unusual and distressing emotions.

"Really, Your Majesty, I must protest—"

"You're always protesting. Churak, what is it now?"

"There is a lady here—" began Churak.

"Oh, only that," murmured His Majesty softly. "I breathe more easily. I might even say it is good news. Who is she?"

CHAPTER III

“YOUR MAJESTY, she did not ask for you, as would have been far more correct. Indeed, I pointed out to her she should at least have sent an application by telegram yesterday asking that she should be granted an audience.”

“And what did she say to that?”

“I regret to say, Your Majesty, that she replied that it might be the custom in Constantia-Felix for ladies to call upon gentlemen, but that it wasn’t in New York, nor so far as she had been able to observe during Your Majesty’s visits to the Riviera, in either Cannes or Monte Carlo. That she preferred to see the Princess Lydia. So she just dropped in.”

“To see me—I” began Lydia.

“Churak,” said Georges, with an appearance of distinct interest, “it sounds most astonishingly like—”

“It is, sire. Mrs. Hastings.”

“Mrs. Alfred?”

“Of New York.”

“God bless my soul!” ejaculated His Majesty.

“Who is she, Papa?”

“She is,” replied Georges with infinite politeness, “with the exception of you and Miss Bidgerton, perhaps, the most charming and bewildering woman in the whole world.”

"And an American!" cried Lydia ecstatically.

"An American!" wailed Miss Bidgerton, beginning this time unmistakably to weep.

"My good Miss Bidgerton—" began His Majesty.

"I can't help it, Your Majesty." The excellent Bidgerton prepared to go. "What with our having to leave Lichtenmont and now all these Americans rushing in upon us and me remembering how in Queen Victoria's time it was so difficult for them to go to Court. Oh, I can't help it, Your Majesty," and still dissolving, she backed out of the door.

"The old guard dies," remarked Georges, observing her philosophically, "but it never surrenders." And he then turned his attention to his daughter.

"It is," said that young woman with conscious pride, "the first time any one has ever craved an audience with me. I will receive her, Count Churak."

"Begging Your Royal Highness's pardon," commented the old chamberlain dryly, "Mrs. Alfred Hastings did not 'crave an audience.' If I may quote her textually she simply said that as she was motoring by she thought she'd drop in to see you."

"No, that isn't exactly craving, is it?" said the Princess Lydia with a little pout.

"You can't have it both ways, my dear," said her father. "With your views! And you must be consistent."

"Tell her to drop in then, Count Churak."

"It would be more in accordance with court etiquette—"

"That I should see her first and alone?" suggested His Majesty. "You meant that of course, Churak?"

"I'm sure he *didn't*," began the Princess Lydia. But the Count answered gravely:

"Yes, Your Majesty, I most certainly meant that, of course."

You see, he knew Georges of old. And he was a faithful servant. He quite understood that kings required a great deal of female affection, and he saw always a suitable place in the cosmos for all ladies who loved to languish in a royal presence. But he found it difficult to excuse the existence of those American ladies—he had sufficiently often encountered them when he accompanied his royal master on vacations from Constantia—who also required a great deal of affection but did not feel it in the least incumbent upon them to love, in return, even the most exalted personages.

It is a century-old quarrel between Europe and America. And if even kings have complained of the coldness of our lovely compatriots, how much more loudly and bitterly have mere French marquises or Italian counts, subjected even more unrelentingly to the rigors of our national Puritanism? It is hard to believe that even the war has changed all this. Europe has lately been thronged with clear-eyed pretty American women who have doubtless, even during the boom of guns and the fanfares of trumpets, bewildered and enslaved the luckless indigenous male, only to recross the Atlantic heart-free and ultimately to confide themselves to the clean virile young gentlemen who adorn our magazine covers and our clothes and collars advertisements.

It is, of course, reported, and upon most credible

authority, that ladies of the very highest New York fashion have sometimes ventured very "near the edge" as the phrase goes. Indeed it would possibly be nothing short of an insult to Mrs. Alfred Hastings even to suspect that she had not gazed into the abyss. But during the years following the death of Freddie Hastings, a smart demise upon the polo field at Newport, an event now happily ten years remote, she had, apparently, always withdrawn daintily from edges after looking over them. It had never seemed to make her dizzy, only just a little more charming, if that could be. Experts in these matters, and they abounded in Europe, asserted that no one could say "no" quite so prettily, even so tenderly, as she. Was she not, in fact, all that the old Count Churak deplored in womanhood as it came in contact with the titled classes, classes which, it may as well be admitted, were before the war often too light-minded and pleasure-loving? Even Georges IV of Constantia-Felix himself—but the object of this story is not primarily to commit *lèse-majesté*.

Mrs. Hastings could not, of course, even at this period, be unknown to any reader of our newspapers, though the American press had not yet taken quite the liberty which will here be taken in dealing with the matter of the attentions paid her by European gentlemen. Still what may be termed her less private movements were always chronicled, her frocks celebrated, her photograph printed constantly not only in Sunday Supplements but in *Vanity Fair*. Even in the time of her comparative obscurity she could scarcely spend a quiet morning matching up a few new pearls for her

string at Cartier's without that admirable jeweler's mentioning it to the reporter of the New York *Herald*. She cared nothing, so she often asserted, for publicity. It may have been true, yet how could she tell?—she had known nothing else! The American papers had come very little into the life of the Princess Lydia in that remote and charming city of Lichtenmont, she knew not so much of Mrs. Alfred Hastings as the humblest working girl on Fifth Avenue. Georges IV of course knew quite as much as the readers of the New York *Herald*, if not more. But no one at that moment suspected just what a figure she was to play in the reconstruction of Europe.

She paused an instant as she came in. She was in gray, with the simplest summer furs of squirrel—the whole thing could not have cost more than five or six thousand francs in the Rue de la Paix and one saw at a glance that, even though the war was over, she was still economizing. Georges had not seen her since that summer of 1914; he could not have said whether her hair wasn't a shade redder now than it had been then. It was, at any rate, the prettiest imaginable color now, it grew in the same lovely way at the nape of her neck, it curled in the same enticing fashion around a pink ear. Five years had, of course, not made her look older—it takes more than five years to do that to a woman of spirit and fashion nowadays—but they had made her look—different somehow. You could guess that, perhaps, in her gayety there would sometimes be tears now. The war has done odd things to people, made gay people sad and sad people gay. Mrs. Hastings had worked ten hours a day in the

American Hospital at Neuilly. Her villa at Beaulieu on the blue Mediterranean had been filled first with disabled British officers, later with boys from home. Her apartment in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, which in old days was always described as a mere tiny *pied à terre*, just big enough to hold its owner and no more, somehow had been able to accommodate sixteen little children, refugees from the German advance across the France which Mrs. Hastings had loved so well. But she had found nothing inconsistent in turning from the bedside of some poor lonely boy, to whom she had seemed like some bright vision of a ministering angel, to—shall we say?—the question of securing the quite beautiful black and pink pearls which she now wore, one in each ear, or the problem, perhaps, of giving a little dinner at the Ritz for the newest and handsomest aviator. Women are like that, and, in a world which might otherwise be quite dull, may we not say, "Thank God" they are?

It was five years since His Majesty of Constantia-Felix had seen her, and somehow it gave him a little catch within. But this, so he told himself, even as he started forward with hand outstretched to greet her, was of course because it was five years since he had seen a really pretty woman smartly turned out by Callot. Her color rose a little as she saw him, but her eyes grew an even serener, cooler blue, and her head was slightly cocked to one side in the old gay provocative way.

"Your Majesty!" she exclaimed, and she sank in a demure curtsy that yet seemed to have a shade of affectionate mockery in it. "This is too great an honor.

It was only Her Royal Highness I hoped to see."

"I must decline to believe that," he answered, with an affectation of severity. "I am convinced it was I whom you hoped and meant to see. I hope it was," he added, quite simply.

"In any case," she said, "it was only because my motor broke down just in front of your door."

"Your motor *would* break down," he said, severely again.

"It generally does," she admitted, "at just the right place. Lilly Sandfield and I motored in Brittany once with a very attractive party—the car always broke down at such a good place for a picnic tea! I ought to explain now that I've come from Geneva and that I'm on my way to Delices-les-Bains where I'm going to take a cure. That makes my story more convincing, doesn't Your Majesty think?"

"Oh, yes," agreed His Majesty. "Only they'll never *cure* you. Of many delightful qualities," he finished, as she looked a little startled.

"I'm really very tired—" And any one who had been there would have been very sorry she was very tired. "I've been doing war-work. I needn't say that. Every living American woman has been doing war-work. And most of them in France, so the poor French feel."

"I've been doing war-work, too," he said, and he bent a little forward as if he cared something to have her understand something of what he said, understand and believe, too. "Possibly no one quite recognizes it. If it hadn't been for me, my country might possibly have gone to war—on the wrong side."

"I've always said that was it," she broke out impulsively.

"I have to thank you for defending me."

"To think that I can defend you!"

"It's come to that. It's come to a lot of things."

He pulled a chair a little towards her.

"Do I sit down in your presence, Majesty?"

"Ah," he shook his head meditatively and merely asked with a smile:

"Do I sit down in yours, dear lady?"

"It's a pleasant view."

"Yes," he answered. "It is. The *Lac des Alpes* is very blue. But this villa is—you never came to Lichtenmont, did you? The palace was rather decent, too few bathrooms of course, but it was nice. Some charming rococo rooms. My grandfather did them over in the French style. He was, alas, that I should have to say it of him, in love with a very famous actress of the *Comedie Française*. You must pardon him that—you see he knew so few Americans."

She looked at him, not wholly displeased.

"It takes more than a revolution to revolutionize you, doesn't it, Your Majesty?"

And then she rose, and swept for a moment across the room and to the window and the view of the *Lac des Alpes*, which was indeed very blue.

"We've been friends for a long time, haven't we?" she asked, without turning to him from the lake. And then without waiting for an answer, "I think it gives me the right to ask a question. Is this," she indicated the villa of Branchazay, "to be the future?"

"Won't you sit down again?" he asked gravely and

as she did so he paced once back and across the room in silence and then stopped before her.

"I've naturally thought about it a good deal. And the only thing I've thought of I could do to earn my living would be to keep a hotel, or a restaurant. I know a lot about food and the manners of good head-waiters are what those of kings ought to be, undoubtedly. At anything else I'd be, at my age, incompetent. What do you think of this plan? Will you patronize the *Restaurant du Roi sans Trône*?"

She shook her head.

"I suppose it would be simple justice," she said, "but no, I don't like the idea. What's the alternative?"

"The alternative is to remain a king, even without a throne." And instinctively he drew himself up. His visitor, looking at him, meditated that now the real man spoke. "And that," he went on, "is what I mean to be. I mean to be ready—for anything," he added more lightly. "I mean to be faithful to memories and traditions and to a few sad old people and loyal romantic lads, mostly in the guards, back in Constantinia."

"Kings are romantic, of course," murmured Mrs. Hastings.

"Perhaps we'll be the romance of the just and proletarian future, who knows? At any rate I think it's our duty, if we are the last of our race, to keep our colors flying to the end."

"It's complicated," mused the lady. "I really don't know what America will do without kings."

"I might go to America."

And it is conceivable that this question might have been discussed if the Princess Lydia had not now impatiently burst into the room. They are all a little alike, these royalties; she had arrived as a girl like any other, but at the sight of Mrs. Hastings, who had *not* "craved an audience" she stiffened to a Royal Highness.

The visitor curtsied and the Princess Lydia began in the best and dullest manner of a royal lady making conversation.

"You are from America? And you are visiting Switzerland?"

"I am motoring to *Delices-les-Bains* to take a cure," replied the guest with suitable humility, "though His Majesty discourages me somewhat of its ever curing me."

Mrs. Hastings breathed a faint sigh upon the air, whether at the thought of her approaching visit or with boredom at the present one it would have been difficult to say, when suddenly the Princess Lydia launched a bomb, to employ phrases suitable to the present epoch.

"Will you take me with you, Mrs. Hastings?" she asked, blushing furiously.

Georges IV gazed at his daughter, Mrs. Hastings gazed from her to him.

"Will I, Your Majesty?" She addressed him.

"This is a new idea, Lydia."

"But a good one," answered the girl.

"Of course to-day people think any new idea is a good one—" began the king. But his daughter interrupted him, almost impatiently.

"I've thought it all out, Papa. I mean to go merely as Miss Lydia—Miss Lydia Smith."

"May I ask who Miss Lydia Smith is?" ventured her father.

"Couldn't she be an American, Mrs. Hastings?"

Our friend hurriedly apprized the princess, perhaps particularly the sadly cut jacket of gray flannelish stuff.

"No," she delivered judgment, "I don't quite believe she could. Not a New Yorker at any rate."

"Then she is like Bidgy, the daughter of an English clergyman—"

"Really I protest—" he began.

"Is Your Royal Highness's English quite good enough?" This from Mrs. Hastings. "The daughters of English clergymen are very, very English."

"Couldn't my father have—well, couldn't he have married a Frenchwoman and died when I was quite young and suppose I'd been brought up on the Continent?"

"Really, my child, for one so young you show an astonishing facility for deception, not to call it lying."

"I don't quite understand—" began Mrs. Hastings.

"My daughter thinks she's tired of being a princess. She wants to see a little of the world, she wants to see whether she can't enjoy the world on her own merits."

Mrs. Hastings' eye again rested upon the gray jacket and the knob of yellow hair, in just the wrong place upon the Princess Lydia's head. Her expression was non-committal as to the probabilities of much enjoyment.

"I'm sure I shall love Delices—" began Her Royal Highness.

"My dear," said her father, "I have not yet heard Mrs. Hastings agree to take you."

"Agree to take me?" haughtily.

"My dear, I don't think you quite understand. I'm sure our friend has quite a royal position in New York and New York is much larger than the late Lichtenmont, to say nothing of our present miserable royal abode in the Villa Branchazay. Please remember too that you're only Miss Lydia Smith."

"I'll try to remember that I'm Miss Lydia Smith. Indeed I will," she cried impulsively to her visitor. "Won't you take me, dear Mrs. Hastings?"

"When do you want to go?"

"At once. Especially before this afternoon. Couldn't we start at once in your motor? It wouldn't take me any time at all to get a few clothes packed."

"Clothes!" said Mrs. Hastings rather ominously. "Take nothing but a tooth-brush. Thank God there are shops at Delices."

"Oh, lovely!" exclaimed the girl, clapping her hands quite as Miss Lydia Smith might have done. "I know my things are awful. And, Mrs. Hastings," more shyly, "don't you think something could be done about my figure?"

"Something?" cried Mrs. Hastings. "Everything! The female figure, my dear, is entirely a question of—but we must spare your father. There have been times when I've worn them to the knees and I will to the ankles if it ever became necessary," she concluded.

"Then you think I could be," shyly began Miss Smith, "just the least bit pretty?"

"I think you can be just as pretty," replied her chaperon, "as we decide it is wise for you to be. That's a matter on which I must get your father's orders. Run along and get ready, your Royal—that is, my dear Miss Smith. I'll be ready in about ten minutes."

"Papa, give Mrs. Hastings a great deal of money for me. I want to be extravagant."

"That's not for princesses nowadays," she heard him say as she left the room.

"My orders, please, Your Majesty," she asked, although the tone did not somehow suggest that she was accustomed to obey even royal gentlemen. "And why does she particularly want to go away before this afternoon?"

"She wants to avoid meeting Prince Otto of Hellenos who is coming this afternoon officially to ask her hand in marriage. Incidentally she is going to marry him, of course, in due time."

"You want that? And she doesn't?" Mrs. Hastings got the situation clear before she commented upon it.

"Well, I'm not sure that she isn't right and you wrong."

"I still retain my ideas of the parental relation," he said, a little stiffly, "and of the position of a princess."

"Yes, I know," insisted his lovely friend. "But, to employ an American phrase, she'd be marrying on a

falling market if she marries this Otto. We've thought a good deal about this question at home. When the slump in royalty came—if you'll pardon the brutality of the phrase, I don't really mean it unkindly—a good many bargain hunters thought titles might be picked up cheap. Quite a lot of girls considered George of Greece. And then there was the Crown Prince of Sweden. And Wales. Newport was prepared to take him quite seriously, so they tell me. But in the end it seemed an uncertain investment to what they call conservative buyers. And our own men looked so well in uniform when they came back! Quite a lot of the smartest women are marrying Americans."

"You yourself," he asked lightly, "would of course not consider marrying a title?" After all the inquiry committed him to nothing.

"Have I ever," she replied, smiling with great sweetness, "said I'd consider marrying anything again?" When you come to think of it this committed her to nothing either.

There was an instant's silence. He looked at her. She smiled, but she cast her eyes down demurely, as perhaps one should before a king.

"Yes, of course, of course," he almost muttered. And then in quite a different brisker voice, "Well, we were to talk about Miss Smith. I want her to have a good time, to sow just one tiny little wild oat. To see a little life, to meet a few young men if you can find them for her."

"I can only try, Your Majesty. I sometimes *do* find young men."

"Yes, yes, naturally. I'd like her to be able to compare them with Prince Otto when she *does* meet him. I think he can stand it."

"You'd think it safe to let her fall in love?"

"The least trifle perhaps. And then be disappointed. I don't know. What do you think? Of course it's not really hard on a girl that she can't marry her first love."

"It isn't always possible." She seemed to meditate and her eyes shone, with tenderness perhaps, he thought. "I was only fourteen when it happened to me. And he drove a milk-cart. Anyway your girl shan't have a serious love affair. I'll nip it in the bud somehow. I'll do something. I promise."

"Your promise is all I want. She'll be safe with you."

He took her hand. And then somehow he swayed just a trifle towards her. She looked quickly at him.

"I've some excellent rules of conduct which I shall teach Your Majesty's daughter." And as he did not release her hand, "For example, I never permit gentlemen to kiss me before lunch."

"Would you perhaps stay to lunch?" he asked. "And go on to Delices afterwards."

But it appeared there would not be time.

CHAPTER IV

WE may, perhaps, in imagination accompany for a little way upon their road our two heroines; it is hoped that to the end of their story, or as much of it as is to be related here, each will have her admirers. When, a few minutes after Mrs. Hastings' most prudent decision not to stay at Branchazay for lunch, her motor drew up in the courtyard for the departure, Miss Lydia Smith appeared, somewhat to her new chaperon's astonishment, with Miss Bidgerton.

The princess drew her American friend aside for a moment. And her words, confidentially uttered, are repeated, not for their intrinsic importance but because they represent not the worst side of her.

"I found Bidgy packing. She assumed she was to go. She's my pest of course, but I suppose she loves me."

"Won't it, well, rather interfere?"

"It will interfere enormously. But," here she smiled, "if I've had a dull time, you may imagine what poor Bidgy has had. Do you mind awfully if we give her a good time, too?"

Mrs. Hastings regarded her young charge almost affectionately.

"I don't mind a bit," she said.

"And," said the girl, "I wish you'd call me Lydia."

It was perhaps a strategic mistake.

"I'll take that under consideration," replied Mrs. Hastings, and though her smile persisted it had not quite the same gayety in it now. "I may point out to you, dear, in the very beginning, that I am not old enough to be your mother, at least," and she hesitated the fraction of a second, "I don't want to think I am—just yet. Still I think I *will* call you Lydia, after all. And we'll give Bidgy a good time."

Severe critics might have views as to how our friend commenced with Bidgy. It was as the swift flowing motor rose to the crest of a hill and disclosed the view of the pretty little capital of the canton lying at the foot of the *Lac des Alpes*. Miss Bidgerton knew that as refined and cultured women they should here admire the panorama of the Savoyard Alps. And when the princess chose that moment to exclaim ecstatically that she wanted to know everything about New York Miss Bidgerton again damply gave way to her despair.

"You must try not to mind my being an American. I won't smoke cigars nor chew plug tobacco. I won't wear my native costume of feathers and skins while I'm with you. And really I never speak through my nose any more than you hear me now. And after all it is quite a little nose."

Miss Bidgerton dabbed at her eyes.

"I don't mean to be rude, Mrs. Hastings. I've been out of England so long. Things have changed a great deal since I was presented to her late Majesty Queen

Victoria. I understand that even under the late King Edward—”

“Oh, dear King Edward, he was delightful, wasn’t he?”

In spite of herself poor Bidgy sat up at this.

“Did you know him?” she asked.

“Why, yes. Didn’t you?” replied Mrs. Hastings. “I thought quite a lot of English people knew him. Of course all nice Americans did.”

It is sad to say and quite wrong for Mrs. Hastings to know that this was really the way to give Miss Bidgerton a good time, insult her slightly and then mention the names of your acquaintances among the British aristocracy. Under such treatment she distinctly revived.

“Do you know the present king?” she asked now, trembling with excitement.

“Not well,” replied Mrs. Hastings. “He goes in such a dull set in London.”

“He’s so good. And so is the dear, dear queen.”

“Yes, in a way that’s what I meant.”

But Miss Bidgerton was now in ecstasy and did not even notice the implied criticism.

“And of course you know the Princess Victoria Louise,” she went on, with quite an air. “I used to see her when I was with the family of the Italian Ambassador—”

“But, Bidgy,” interrupted Lydia, “why do you worry Mrs. Hastings? After all papa could have told you plenty about kings.”

“His Majesty once said to me that he didn’t consider

the private lives of Royalty a suitable subject for him to talk about with me. But," she burst out into an almost feverish vivacity, "I must say I do love a king. Don't you, now, Mrs. Hastings?"

This lady considered.

"I don't think I'm ready to go quite that far with you," she said slowly.

If it is permissible one would wonder whether she meant any particular king. But Lydia again interrupted.

"Bidgy, just because you're such a snob about us you're forgetting that I want to know everything about New York."

Will this give any idea of our three ladies' talk as they motored on? Pleasant as it might be, it would be difficult to find space to record all the talk of any three ladies in the world as they sped over smooth roads in pleasant pure sunlight towards a place abounding in shops and gay pleasures and perhaps even young men.

They dipped down to the little capital and lunched at the *Café du Nord* where there are still the best grilled kidneys in the world. The lake sparkled and the blue river slid swiftly by under the very balcony upon which they sat. The head-waiter remembered Mrs. Hastings—indeed he treated them quite as if they had been royalty. The food was delectable and there was for the three of them a pint of white *Villeneuve*. It was, however, not this but new-found liberty which intoxicated little Lydia, whose cheek was flushed till she already began to look pretty. Miss Bidgerton, it must be recorded, made an excellent lunch and gave

only the slightest shudder when after lunch Mrs. Hastings produced a white onyx holder set with tiny emeralds and lit a cigarette.

"May I, too?" said Lydia, waking Miss Bidgerton at last to horror.

"I think not. I think not till you're married."

"You make me want to be married!" exclaimed that frank young woman.

"Your Roy—!" began Bidgy.

"Bidgy, if you call me that you'll go straight back to Branchazay—third class."

"I don't want to go back."

"Of course you don't. None of us wants to. We want to go forward. Oh, Mrs. Hastings, you don't know how I love it! Think of an American girl's life being always like this!"

Mrs. Hastings patted Miss Smith's hand.

"Not many American girls, I'm afraid, would get so much fun out of motoring to a little watering place like *Delices-les-Bains*."

"But don't you love it too, dear Mrs. Hastings?"

"Yes, my dear, but not so much as you. I wonder if it can be that I'm growing—not old but a little older. I mustn't let that happen. And yet," she went on almost as if to herself, "I daresay you'd have a better time at *Delices* if I were a good deal older and quite thoroughly unattractive."

We shall do well to remember this speech, for Mrs. Hastings is a lady upon whose lightest word one does well to hang.

Lunch at Branchazay was a much less satisfactory

meal. There were, just by chance, grilled kidneys, too, shockingly overdone, and Georges, meditating sadly upon them and remembering the experience of Stefan the Eighteenth of Illyria, wondered if he would not be forced to marry *his* cook as the only way to induce her to *stop* cooking for him. Count Churak, who had been invited to join the royal table (the cook was already, after only two weeks, getting restive about extra services for the less great) was not an alleviator of gloom, and the grilled kidneys, producing an almost immediate indigestion within him, made him even less gay as coffee and liqueurs arrived; his royal master dismissed his chamberlain to bicarbonate and solitude and himself paced the villa's terrace in quite kingly gloom. Count Churak, in addition to being dull and dyspeptic, had been singularly offensive in certain remarks about the excessive prices charged by the butcher at Larentonville. Georges felt outraged at being asked to consider the price of beef. And Churak had also transmitted something quite intolerable from the cook about the relative economy of purchasing what were termed "boiling fowls" instead of "grilling chickens," it appearing that the former were aged outcasts (ex-kings of the chicken run probably, remarked His Majesty bitterly) who might be obtained cheap. The whole thing was intolerable and degrading. If this was what ordinary people were ordinarily subjected to, no wonder there were revolutions, he meditated.

Upon his further meditations we will not too much intrude. Have not even the most unroyal of us lately

thought bitterly of opportunities missed? Georges was frankly troubled, too, by the approaching advent of Otto of Hellenos. This prince was to come by the morning train from Zug, and considering the discomforts of European railway travel at present, this seemed to betray an almost romantic devotion to the idea of marrying the Princess Lydia, whose attitude could only be like a cold *douche* to the ardent creature. To describe princes about to marry princesses as ardent was, so Georges knew well, ordinarily an exaggeration. Yet Otto, as reported by his father Gregorius the Second of Hellenos, was so eager to do the right, the loyal thing by his royal dynasty, by his heritage of hopes, that it was pitiful to have to hurt his gallant young soul. It was indeed likely to be an awkward scene, and Georges has been described in vain if an impression has not been given that on the whole his life had been passed in avoiding such scenes. There was very little to do about it now, since he had judged it wise to give Lydia her head a bit. But on the strength of the perturbing interview ahead of him he permitted himself an extra glass of liqueur brandy. He then fell asleep, as is so good for one after a bad lunch, over a novel of Monsieur Paul de Kock, an author, in Georges' opinion, most unjustly despised nowadays. At three-thirty, Augustin, His Majesty's valet, roused him with the news that His Royal Highness of Hellenos had arrived. In spite of the nap the prospect of the interview still remained unpleasant.

Prince Otto had not slept after lunch on the train, and the meal had been even worse than the one at

Branchazay, although there were no grilled kidneys. He had insisted on traveling incognito, and though the station master at little Larentonville had a red carpet which he really delighted to put down, Otto had arrived without fuss and come up to the Royal villa in a delightful little American car, called a Ford, which Georges had lately purchased and was meaning to drive himself. He waited in the drawing-room, impatiently tapping his foot, though he knew quite well that as he was only an Heir Apparent (though not very Apparent) and Georges a reigning (though not very reigning) monarch it was quite correct that he should cool his heels a little waiting for his host.

The warmth of Georges' greeting however more than made up for the delay—His Majesty showed all the cordiality which is usually displayed towards one with whom there is about to take place an awkward scene. And His Royal Highness, too, displayed an eager boyish wish to be on the best terms with his future father-in-law. They shook hands cordially, they even slapped each other on the shoulder, although this statement is made in the full knowledge that many will refuse to believe in any such royal informality. They were both gay and yet they both seemed nervous.

"I'm glad to see you," said Georges.

"I'm glad to see *you*, sir," said Otto. They were very much like other embarrassed men. But they pulled themselves together, just as the rest of us must sometimes.

"You'll have a whisky-and-soda, won't you?" said Georges. This gave a delay while the Prince of Hel-

lenos mixed himself a stiffish drink, and while we note the English tone of continental monarchs.

"I have something rather serious to say to you, my boy—" began the older man.

"It's all serious, sir. But if you don't mind I'd like first—"

"You'd like first to see my daughter of course. Well, that shall be after we've had things out a bit. You see—"

"Pardon me," Otto replied. He had a boyish way with him, but he was more serious than Georges—he had not lived so long—and he had a firmer hand. "Pardon me, if I talk first. Then you can tell better if you still have to say to me what you had to say to me."

"My dear boy, if it's a confession of the usual youthful *amours de Prince*, provided the lady is paid off and satisfied and pretty enough to do credit to your taste we'll not discuss it. I myself—"

"It's nothing like that," replied Otto, a little stiffly and a little flushed.

"You prefer not to confess. Well, that's immaterial."

"I've nothing to confess sir, except—" he hesitated a moment. "I've had an awful scene with my father. Old Gregorius"—in this way did he speak of a parent and a king—"is a frightful reactionary. No wonder they got rid of him in Hellenos. I told him last night that if I *ever* went back it would be to try for the position of President of the Hellenosian Republic."

"That has a certain *chic*," said Georges. "And the

suggestion is not altogether lacking in worldly wisdom." He spoke easily but he, too, poured himself out a drink. This young man was disturbing.

"I told him that I wished I'd been born not a prince, but a citizen of a Republic."

"An American, perhaps," suggested Georges and an odd half-amused look of reminiscence stole into his eyes.

"Yes, I said that, sir. But that was only for the moment. I love Hellenos, sir."

"Perhaps old Gregorius, as you term him, does too," said Georges softly, "in his way."

"For what she can do for him. I honestly want to see what I can do for her."

"You're right, my boy. You're right. That's how I feel about Constantia-Felix—when it's too late."

"You understand? You are a brick, sir. I didn't believe any one of your generation—"

"My daughter's only eighteen and I've only just turned thirty-nine myself," remarked Georges suavely. "And I assure you you interest me hugely. But now to talk of my daughter—"

"Let me finish, sir. We've come to your daughter. I said that if I went back to Hellenos, which I love, and was allowed again to stand by her temples or her hills, I wanted to bring with me a bride from the people, some peasant girl whose clean red blood could wash out the blueness from my children's. Yes, my children must start a new and different and better dynasty of the Antoniades."

"I see," murmured Georges. He smiled and yet his eyes were still a little sad.

"Do you really see, sir?" asked Otto eagerly. "Do you see that I cannot, that I cannot marry your daughter?"

"You haven't seen her."

"Yes. I wanted to say all this before I saw her. It seems as though it was nicer, as if it made my refusing her less personal."

"I daresay she felt that way," said Georges, "and that's why she's gone away without seeing you."

"Gone away?" cried Otto.

"Yes. So as to make her refusing you less personal. She quite declines, you know, to marry you."

Oddly enough the situation did not seem to give the heir apparent of Hellenos the pleasure it should have done.

"She refuses *me*?" he stammered.

"Well, you refuse *her*, you know," protested the young lady's father.

"Yes, but I was given to understand that she—" He stopped. After all it wasn't quite the thing one said.

"Yes. We were given to understand that you—that you desired the match passionately."

Otto considered this a moment. Really it only seemed to make matters worse.

"And she thought this and still she refused me," he blurted out, getting a little red in the face—with annoyance probably. "Might I ask what she thought I was?"

Georges continued to smile. "If," said His Majesty, "I had a bit of that old-fashioned chivalry of

father's, I should insist on knowing what you thought my daughter was."

"Oh, now you're trying to make me out a cad. That's what old Gregorius did," exclaimed the boy, now fairly looking as if he could cry with annoyance. "But I couldn't agree to an arranged marriage."

"That's just what Lydia said she couldn't agree to. Odd, isn't it? She wanted to be free. She wanted—and after all can we blame her so much?—to marry a man she loved. If she was ever to go back to Constantia-Felix she felt sure her loyal subjects, compatriots of course I mean, would welcome her more gladly—what was your phrase, my boy? Her language was singularly like yours. She was rather radical in her talk. She doesn't believe much in kings. She goes on a good deal about America. She—"

"I say," interrupted Otto, "I think she sounds rather nice."

"I may be prejudiced—" began Georges.

"I didn't suppose princesses were like that."

"I daresay she had no idea princes were like you."

"I'd almost like to have seen her," ventured our young gentleman. "Of course photographs give you such a bad idea of a girl."

"Yes, don't they? Lydia is growing prettier every moment."

He felt that so far he might venture to go. Mrs. Hastings had guaranteed that there were some excellent shops at *Delices-les-Bains*. • •

"It's a frightful mess, isn't it, Otto? I honestly think she'd like you, for yourself alone. But she wouldn't meet you."

"Where did you say she'd gone?"

"I *didn't* say," answered the young lady's father. "But she has, as a matter of fact, gone to the Hotel de Russie at *Delices-les-Bains*."

"That isn't far, is it? Yes, I shall go to see her there. I like her, for a friend of course. I agree with her that there should be no sentiment between us."

"Certainly not," said His Majesty.

"She deserves something better than a prince as a husband," went on the boy handsomely.

"You'd get on famously together. It's a pity—no, she'd never be herself with you. In fact, though, she's scarcely herself now. I wonder if I can trust you, young man—yes, I'm sure I can. She's at *Delices* merely as Miss Lydia Smith!"

As impartial observers we may wonder whether, although he could doubtless trust Prince Otto, the Princess Lydia could trust her father. There are modern women who say that men have no sense of honor, and this is perhaps not the best moment to combat the statement.

"As Miss Smith!" exclaimed Otto, seemingly ravished by the unusual name. "Then couldn't I go? As Mr. Jones?"

"Why not? It's a striking title."

"I will. What a lark!"

Events of course will prove how much of a lark it was. Man proposes and woman disposes—at any rate an American woman such as Mrs. Hastings of New York. But there is no need to anticipate. It was a pleasant boyish plot which these two male crea-

tures planned. And His ex-Majesty of Constantia-Felix thought how charming a son-in-law the future ex-King of Hellenos would make. The *Lac des Alpes* looked just a little less blue.

CHAPTER V

DELICES-LES-BAINS is, as the French so prettily term places in their language, *coquet*, which does not exactly mean coquettish, but merely trim and bright and gay and a little impudent, all, in short, that a small watering place should be. It sits in a green amphitheater of the lesser Alps, and its healing springs flow in a marble temple which might well have been erected to Venus instead of Hygeia, so fair and fashionable and radiant are the ladies who approach it across a green lawn edged with those preposterous yet pleasant French flowerbeds in which all the colors of the rainbow are mixed.

There are colonnades all around the green lawn and under them the smallest and most elegant shops, idling and buying in which at incredible prices so delightfully soothe the sensibilities of the most exclusive women. There has been a great deal of talk in the newspapers of how, during the war, feminine nerves had disappeared, how, indeed, the whole race of women had been raised to some higher plane upon which there was no lure of clothes and trinkets. Fortunately for Delices and, perhaps, for the rest of the world, a great deal of "curing" is still found necessary, and, fortunately for its shop-keepers, choosing a really becoming gown or hat and picking up, say, a jeweled wrist

watch of a new design, still make wonderfully for health.

This talk of shops is by no means beside the point; it concerns vitally Miss Lydia Smith, and explains certain transformations which the dullest observer might have detected in that young woman as, the second morning after her arrival, she appeared upon the small veranda in front of her friend Mrs. Hastings' *appartement* in the Hotel de Russie. It was very pleasant, this little veranda. There were wicker chairs and a table painted pink and white and there were great pots of blue hydrangeas growing as they will nowhere where the French language is not spoken. There was pink about Miss Smith's costume and blue, too—but it is idle for any man even to try to describe it.

It is, indeed, perhaps more idle for any man even to touch upon the processes by which ladies grow lovelier. Nothing so crude as artifices like paint and powder is meant here; even a mere man realizes that there are darker mysteries. Perhaps it is no more than the mere will to be beautiful, *un peu de bonne volonté*, as Parisians say, which sends a light shining from within, causes each ringlet to fall into just the right place, makes the eye brighter and the cheek softer. Happiness sometimes does it, and if at this magical moment the right dressmaker and coiffeur are at hand a pretty miracle may happen over-night. It is a grateful task to hint that something like this *had* happened to our little princess.

She looked at the small valley in the morning sunlight, at the dew still glittering on the branches of

the pines, and it seemed excellent to be young and even more gratifying to feel that one was at least moderately nice looking.

"I never dreamed," she said in a soft voice, "that I should have such clothes. I don't believe I ever dreamed there were such clothes. Why, even Bidgy looks—well, quite human."

"Where is Bidgy?" asked Mrs. Hastings from a *chaise longue* by the side of a pink and white breakfast table where coffee and rolls and butter—there is butter in Europe again—were sitting temptingly.

It appeared that Bidgy had gone for a walk before breakfast, just as they did in Queen Victoria's day. Was she not wonderful?

Lydia poured herself coffee in a pink and white cup. And as she did so she shyly looked at Mrs. Hastings, looked at her clothes from head to foot, and an odd puzzled look came into her eyes.

"Dressmakers," she ventured, "succeed, I suppose, better with some people than with others."

"Yes," answered her American friend a little dryly, "though of course it depends a little on what they're asked to do. Perhaps you don't like what I have on?"

"Oh, it's lovely, of course" (Mrs. Hastings smiled kindly), "only—"

"Yes, I know. Only—" replied the wearer of the costume under discussion.

It would have been a delightful, though perhaps perilous adventure for a writer to have tried to describe a negligee frothing with lace and ribbons and chiffon such as was ordinarily our friend's first step in the day's dressing. But to-day she was quite dif-

ferently attired. Black grosgrain silk, it is a historically well-known fact we are informed, has not been much worn since the eighties of the last century. Yet in it Mrs. Hastings was now clad in a *confection* straight from Violette's in the Rue de Paris.

"It looks almost like mourning."

"It is, in a way," replied Mrs. Hastings. "I remembered that I'd never worn any when my fifth cousin Augusta died five years ago. I consulted Miss Bidgerton and we decided I'd feel happier if I wore it now."

Lydia considered her for a moment.

"Mrs. Hastings, I must tell you that you are just as bad and frivolous as papa."

"I've been a good deal in his set," murmured the lady, taking butter.

"I don't believe you ever had a fifth cousin Augusta."

"Perhaps she may have been sixth," was the shameless comment.

"Why *did* you let Violette do it? Your clothes were lovely yesterday!"

"My dear, I'll tell you something. It's an enormous comfort occasionally not to try to look well."

"I'm sure I shan't ever grow tired of trying to look well."

"You will—some day, though perhaps only for a week at a time. I've just lately realized that. Everything I have on is very dowdy and very loose, too. I've a black garden-hat with a frill of Spanish lace hanging down around the brim. It's a horror—but it hides the face. And I bought a pair of yellow

glasses—they rest the eyes—and hide them, too,” she added, half to herself.

“But you’ve such lovely eyes.”

“Yes, I realize that. Listen, my child, I’m a chaperon, that is to say a dragon guarding a treasure—and I mean to look like one. Haven’t I succeeded?”

“I think you look sweet in spite of everything,” said the girl.

“Well, you’re not a man,” commented the older woman. “By the way, we’ll go down to the Casino to tea this afternoon and have a look who’s here. There are sure to be some people I know and there *may* be some men.”

But a good deal was to happen before tea-time.

At about noon Miss Bidgerton was engaged in penning a letter to her cousin, Mary, who had married the Rev. Arthur Sutro, who had just been presented to the living of Stoke-on-Chelmes by his second cousin Lord Basinghurst. Mrs. Hastings in her bedroom was at work upon the black garden hat to which Monsieur Portin, in spite of orders, seemed to have given a touch of style. Each of the ladies, it is to be presumed, thought Miss Lydia Smith was with the other.

That young woman, as a matter of fact, had at eleven-fifteen stepped quietly off the veranda and started towards the Parc du Casino under a singularly becoming sunshade constructed very much on the lines of a huge pink dahlia. At twelve-fifteen Mrs. Hastings and Miss Bidgerton, who were now upon the veranda almost wringing their hands, saw Miss Smith return. She seemed flushed with triumph, as she might

well be, for she had with her a very good-looking young man! He had brown hair, a pleasantly tanned skin and blue eyes, and was quite as good-looking, indeed, as was ever the heir apparent of Hellenos, though that prince had a smart little mustache which Miss Smith's present acquisition lacked.

"I've had such a lovely independent morning," cried Lydia. "And I've brought this gentleman home for lunch."

"Lunch," gasped Miss Bidgerton, and then her voice failed her. Mrs. Hastings fortunately still retained the power of speech. No dragon could have been more dignified.

"May I ask how you met this gentleman?" she asked in icy tones.

"I saw him in the park and he very evidently saw me. Of course I wasn't quite sure how I ought to behave, whether he ought to speak to me or I ought to speak to him. I was awfully embarrassed and I wanted to do what was right," she finished, "so I spoke to him."

"We have both discovered," said the young gentleman very calmly, "that we despise the conventions."

"Evidently!" assented Mrs. Hastings. "And do you seriously imagine that I shall ask you to lunch?"

"I hope so," said the strange young man, bowing in that strange agreeable foreign way from the waist. "I have," he added and he smiled, with a certain touch of confidence, "I have been very well educated to lunch."

Mrs. Hastings was grateful for the amber glasses, she felt they concealed a sparkle in her eyes. The

creature was somehow preposterously like a gentleman, in spite, of course, of behaving preposterously unlike one.

"Of course I am old-fashioned"—indeed in the face of the Princess Lydia's behavior she began to think perhaps she was—"I have a feeling about knowing who it is who lunches with me."

She suddenly inwardly reproached herself—with all her dignity she had already almost invited him. She was grateful for the black garden hat, she hoped it concealed her perturbation. She prayed that it added dignity.

"I suppose, my dear," she said severely to Lydia, "it did not occur to you to ask this young man his name."

"I knew you'd do that—" began the girl when she was interrupted.

"We have both discovered," again the young gentleman spoke very calmly, "that we care what people are, not who they are."

"I," commented Mrs. Hastings, "prefer to know both."

"My name," he said, and he spoke quickly and precisely, "is Ottok Morpurgo. My father is a corn merchant in Eastern Petronalia."

"Eastern Petronalia!" wailed Miss Bidgerton—it was almost her only contribution to the discussion.

"That, my dear Miss Bidgerton, is doubtless one of the countries America had never heard of and yet was anxious to give self-determination to."

"It is," said Miss Smith, "a province of Hellenos. And he once saw King Gregorius and his son."

"Are you especially interested in them, may I ask?" It was Mrs. Hastings speaking.

"I just wanted to know if he felt as I do about royalty—if he hated them all."

"And do you?" asked the elder woman.

"I do hate them," he answered almost solemnly, "that is, I hate all their false privileges. I think they are, or at any rate they must be, just human beings—like ourselves."

"I am glad, however," and Miss Smith struck a lighter note, "that we do not have to be like them. That Prince Otto is not a nice fellow, Mr. Morpurgo says. We should not ask *him* to lunch."

"We have not asked Mr. Morpurgo to lunch," said the dragon, quite fairly dragonishly. "What are you doing at Delices-les-Bains, Mr. Morpurgo?"

"I am," he answered, "staying at the Grand Hôtel. Oh, I see," he went on, "I'm traveling. I am thinking of traveling to America. I want to see that great country."

"Yes, so do I!" murmured little Lydia softly, and perhaps Mrs. Hastings did, too, with a small sigh.

"I am learning about it," went on the strange young man. "I am studying the American language. I have some books, one very good one by a Mr. Lardner. I can speak some American, too."

"Can you? Speak it!" commanded the dragon.

He turned to the girl.

"You," he said politely, lifting his hat, "are some swell eye teaser. Is it good?" he asked eagerly, turning back to the elder woman.

"It is abominable," she answered. "But it *is* the American language. It is much admired now they tell me in England, all the popular plays are written in it. But don't speak it to any nice American."

"Oh, I see," said the young man very gravely, "the nice Americans are taking up the English language in compliment to their allies in the war. That is delicate."

She looked at him an instant—there was so much to be said that she decided not even to try to say it.

"Americans are *always* delicate," she agreed. "Our country is possibly the last refuge of the old-fashioned distinguished manners. A well-bred American young woman is incapable of behaving as Miss Smith has—"

"Oh," interrupted the strange young man, "your name is Smith. What a pretty name!" And Lydia who had looked wounded at what her chaperon said now seemed pacified.

"A well-bred American young man is incapable of behaving as you have, Mr. ——"

"Morpurgo," supplied Lydia as the dragon hesitated. She lingered over the name as if she liked the sound. You might almost have suspected that for the moment it sounded prettier to her than Smith.

Well, thought Mrs. Hastings, it was prettier than Smith if you came to that. And the young man looked a gentleman. And hadn't she herself, when she was Flo Denison and eighteen, once spoken to a young man on the lawns of the Newport Casino just because he looked a gentleman—and very nice and handsome to boot? Of course it was a chaperon's business to

chaperon, but was it not also to see that her charge enjoyed herself? Her next speech shows Mrs. Hastings trying to be at once severe and kind.

"Mr. Morpurgo," she began, "I must call your attention to the fact that it is time for lunch and that we have *not* asked you to that meal. But," she went on, "I have just been through the visitors' list in the *Gazette des Baigneurs* and it looks like a desert. There is no one I know, absolutely no one. So possibly—only possibly of course—we may ask you to lunch tomorrow."

That afternoon a telegram went to Larentonville. It asked if anything could be discovered about the Morpurgos of Eastern Petronalia. It appeared that it must have been quite easy to discover something, for the telegram in reply came almost at once. It was signed simply "Georges" but that of course was not an impertinence as it might have been with any one else, it was just the way kings do—or did—sign. The telegram said, "Family you inquire about all right. Probably young man too. Respectable but of course not well born. See no harm in acquaintance provided of course it does not go too far."

We may imagine that Georges IV of Constantia-Felix as he penned this communication in the library of his rented château of Branchazay thought he was being clever. There is, of course, no special object in writing this story, but if it *had* an object it would perhaps be to teach men not to try to be clever.

Ottok Morpurgo came to lunch the next day. They had tea with him on Friday on the terrace of the Casino and on Saturday they all motored over to the

Chalet des Grisons to dine, on account, so they said, of the wonderful trout that came from the crystal brook that flowed just by. Miss Bidgerton stayed at home but a fourth was supplied by Vincent Sinclair of New York who had just turned up. Miss Lydia Smith wore a third charming confection of blue and mauve, this time, but Mr. Sinclair admitted afterwards that he had never seen his lovely friend Mrs. Hastings look less well. These were the outward events. But when, upon their return, Lydia, in an amber loose thing with far too many knots and rosettes of orange ribbon on it, timidly came to Mrs. Hastings' bedroom and asked if she might sit a moment by the little crackling wood fire, the older woman looked almost nervously at her young friend. The moment and the clothes portended confidences. And confidences, she foresaw, often placed a dragon, even an American dragon, in embarrassing positions. Had she not promised that Miss Lydia Smith should not go far with any young man, respectable but of course not well born; from Eastern Petronalia?

CHAPTER VI

“**N**O, she does not approve of you,” said Miss Smith the following afternoon at tea-time. There was a pink and white tea table on the little terrace at the Hotel de Russie. And there were four cups, but our young lady and Mr. Ottok Morpurgo were alone when he was thus told of Mrs. Hastings’ lack of appreciation. He flushed a little—he was indeed engagingly boyish—and unconsciously pulled his coat down so that it displayed to greater advantage a charming figure—it is a harmless inevitable instinct in young gentlemen who still have waists.

“Does not approve of me?” he asked, as if surprised, almost as if a little piqued. It is, of course, pleasant when young, even when old, to have *all* ladies approve of you. But a dashing Petronalian could not, of course, long languish under the burden of even the most unfavorable criticism from one so dull, so stern, and so dowdy as Miss Smith’s odd chaperon. Almost at once Mr. Morpurgo recaptured his *aplomb*. His next speech was so suave that one might almost have thought he had been brought up in courts.

“I welcome her disapproval, if it induces her to let us have tea alone together.”

“She’s stayed in her room all day. She’s very cross I think. She sent for Violette from the Rue de Paris—”

"To scold her about her clothes," suggested Mr. Morpurgo, almost airily. "Well, I should think she might. They're ugly enough. Anyhow let's not talk about her, as she's not going to intrude upon us."

"She did not say she would not come for tea," said Miss Smith. "She is very dependent on her tea. It is her age, doubtless."

"Probably it's her age, too, that makes her want to spoil pleasant parties."

All this was agreeably dignified and grown-up on the part of Master Morpurgo. But now again the Old Adam reappeared.

"Of course," he said, almost pettishly, "I am curious to know on what grounds she did not approve of me."

"She is a snob," said little Lydia solemnly. "I hate to hurt your feelings—although of course I know it would not hurt your feelings—but she says you're a mere bourgeois, the son of a tradesman."

"And so I am!" cried Ottok and then he went off into a rather surprising burst of boisterous laughter, which at first Lydia could not quite understand. Then she saw that it must be bitter and satirical with the Byronic tang in it.

"Such people understand nothing," she cried, "of this free new world which you and I live in."

"Oh, but you're wonderful," he murmured, "in what you understand."

"You've made me understand," she answered, "more than I could ever have understood by myself."

This interchange of thought is not quoted to prove any great originality of mind. But originality of mind is not always what makes conversations agree-

able, especially when one is young and the other person has nice eyes. In any case there is no more to record just here, and it is perhaps as well.

"Let's have tea," cried Lydia abruptly.

"I'm glad she didn't forbid you to see me," replied Ottok, almost irrelevantly.

"I suppose she knew it would be useless to *forbid* me anything."

"What is she going to do?" asked Ottok.

"Oh, I don't know," said Miss Smith carelessly. She was putting sugar in his tea and, although there is not yet enough sugar in Europe, she judged, perhaps rightly, that the situation justified her in giving him two lumps. "She said," she went on, "that she would attend to you."

What, indeed, such a phrase might have meant seemed scarcely to rouse the curiosity of these two careless young butterflies fluttering in the sunlight. It might have struck a contemplative philosopher, had such been present, that these words "attend to you" on the lips of Mrs. Alfred Hastings might have an ominous and terrifying significance. But there was no such philosopher there. No clouds darkened the horizon. There was no distant thunder rumbling angrily. Indeed, it seemed to both Miss Lydia Smith and young Mr. Morpurgo that the sun shone more brightly than usual upon Delices and upon the blue hydrangeas and the pink chairs.

There was, indeed, one very singular incident. There had been from time to time a low murmur of voices from the windows at the side of the little villa, as if the dragon in her bedroom were in consultation with

her maid. There came once a burst of laughter and then by contrast the voices seemed to rise a little shrilly as if possibly in anger. Almost at once there was a slight gurgle, as of suppressed hysteria, so it seemed to the young but inexperienced listeners. And then suddenly there sailed forth from the window, like a black and ominous bird, the famous garden hat with a frill of Spanish lace, the "horror" as Mrs. Hastings had so frankly and so adequately styled it. The unfortunate *confection* lay malignly upon a little *parterre* of pink geraniums. Miss Smith and Mr. Morpurgo looked at it in silence and then in silence at each other.

"A tantrum!" finally ventured Lydia.

"I'd hate to see her when she's angry," commented the young man. "Not that I much care," he continued, with the brutality of youth, "about seeing her a great deal anyway."

"She was so nice until last night."

"Tell me about last night," he urged.

"No," and she flushed. "I don't think I can tell you about last night. But she was annoyed because she seemed to think that I—I mean because she thought that you—oh, no, I can't explain it."

He laughed boyishly. "I'd almost say you were trying to flatter me by making me think she's jealous of us and our friendship. But at her age—!" He lifted his hands in smiling mock horror.

"No, of course not," said little Lydia, "not at her age!" And yet somehow there was no such convinced a note in her voice as there had been in his. She walked a few steps across to the terrace's edge. The sun was sinking lower, it touched the plane trees of the *Allée*

de Savoie with gold. It was indeed a pretty, gay, care-free world. The band in the Parc du Casino could be faintly heard playing a dance from *Sisi*. And yet somehow it didn't seem altogether a care-free world. Suddenly she felt a little troubled, a little homesick for the *Lac des Alpes*, even if it were a little blue. And yet the twilight mood vanished instantly at the sound of her companion's voice, though that voice was touched with the half melancholy magic of the hour.

"It's a pretty world, isn't it?" he said, as if in answer to her thought. "Even after the war, and all it's taken from us, there's a good deal left. Oh, there's so much that I want to say to you, Miss Lydia Smith."

"Yes," she murmured.

There was somehow something in the air, something fluttering in those level golden rays. But the sun, too, streamed upon the door that led into the little villa that was so *coquet*. There were striped canvas curtains hanging there, of a russet brown with broad white bands, a pretty fashion in the mode of Venice. These now slowly opened, as a brown chrysalis cracks in the woods as the spring sun warms it. Behind the brown curtains there was color, color that might well have made prettier a butterfly's wing. Yes, there was a great deal in the air.

"There's so much *I* want to say to you, Mr. Morpurgo. Am I too late to be given tea, Lydia dear?"

The voice was somehow softened in harmony with the tenderer aspects of the hour, and with the mellow evening light, easier for ladies than a noonday glare.

She was in a faint green, or perhaps it was a blue.

But there was also pink somewhere, possibly underneath. And there was an odd knot of ribbons at her waist of the colors at the eye of the peacock's plumes. Her hat was distinctly not a horror. And there was a parasol which she slowly opened into the shape of the very cowslip bell where Ariel was used to lie. The sun caught on the copper glints in her hair; poor Lydia's seemed suddenly turned to tow. And poor Lydia's frock that had seemed so smart only a moment before now, it was quite clear, was plain and awkwardly worn. The two younger people, who had thought only an instant earlier that they had so much to say to each other, were now silent. There was a queer little catch in the girl's throat, but all she did was, oddly enough perhaps, to go forward and pick up the horror with the Spanish lace frill from its resting place on the pink geraniums. Mr. Morpurgo kept his eyes upon the advancing vision and unconsciously took a step forward. His cheek was a little flushed as if, in spite of all his protestations, it mattered to him that she so strongly disapproved of him.

But our lovely friend, she is now again that, merely smiled rather bewilderingly at him, really not at all as if she disapproved of him or of any other handsome young man. She turned an instant to Miss Smith, who stood there as if offering the discarded headgear.

"No," she said firmly. "No, Lydia dear, I feel, and look, so much better in this hat. I've given up the glasses, too. I see Mr. Morpurgo better now."

Mr. Morpurgo flushed an even more agreeable and

boyish pink under her scrutiny. He pushed a wicker armchair abundantly supplied with cushions invitingly towards her, and going towards the table seemed awkwardly to be preparing to pour her tea.

Miss Smith flung the black hat back upon the ground with great decision of manner. She rushed almost hurriedly to the cups and saucers.

"I am quite competent," she said, "to give dear Mrs. Hastings her tea."

"I'm quite competent myself," said that lady, still smiling. "Now I'm going to be very American indeed. I'm going to do a thing I haven't done before. I'm going to permit you two nice young people to go down to the Parc du Casino, quite unchaperoned, to hear the end of the band concert."

She seized the teapot, but Miss Smith and Mr. Ottok Morpurgo did not immediately move.

"But that," began the young man stammeringly, "would leave you all alone. And I'm sure that neither of us—"

Miss Smith's voice, a little hard it sounded, interrupted:

"I am going with Bidgy to see the Rev. Skively. There is to be a bazar at the English church."

"But—" began the wretched young man.

"If you'll excuse me—" said Lydia with a sudden brilliant cheerfulness. And she left.

For an instant Mrs. Hastings almost pouted, although it is not ordinarily wise to pout much when one has passed eighteen.

"Well," she said. "Poor Mr. Morpurgo! That leaves me to attend to you."

Here again was the ominous phrase, the threat of that boudoir conference of the night before. Yet somehow it seemed now shorn of terrors.

"Will you?" he asked. "I—well, I could drink another cup of tea."

"I borrow an earlier phrase of yours," she commented. "I think you have been very well educated to drink tea."

He stood an instant silent while she busied herself with the boiling water. He appeared to contemplate afresh her clothes.

"I don't understand," he said slowly.

"My dear Mr. Morpurgo," she replied. "You are not expected to understand. You are very, very young and I am very, though not very, very old."

"Are you?" he asked in a suddenly hoarse voice.

"Oh, yes," she answered. And then, quite irrelevantly, "You know my maid hates you?"

"Does she?" he asked, surprised. "Why?"

"Oh, she hates unpacking," said Mrs. Hastings. This was, it is to be presumed, her idea of how to attend to him.

Three days later the scene upon the terrace looked much the same. Miss Smith and Miss Bidgerton remained immersed in the approaching bazar at the English church and for now the third successive day Mrs. Hastings and Mr. Ottok Morpurgo had been forced to consume *le five o'clock* alone. Visually, as has been hinted, the scene was perhaps unchanged, but conversationally there had been progress.

Mr. Morpurgo bent forward in his pink wicker chair. His eyes were aglow.

"I had no idea," he murmured, "that being in love with you would be like this."

"It always has been," answered the lady with a little sigh.

He jumped up angrily from his seat.

"Why will you say such things as that to me?"

"To make you feel young, dear boy. Isn't it a pleasant thing to feel young? I find it so. You've made me feel young, you know."

"I hate all this kind of talk," he went on. "What's age? Perhaps I'm old and you're young—who knows? I only know that you're wonderful, bewildering. Of course life used to look pleasant enough to me, it does to every young fellow. But you've put five colors where there was only one before. Life shimmers like a rainbow. The world's bigger, wider, gayer, happier now."

"Well," she answered gravely, "one oughtn't to be sorry to have done that for any human being. I'm not sorry, Ottok."

"And when we're married—" he began, sitting down again, and pulling the pink wicker chair a little nearer her.

"Oh, no, not that." She leaned back and she suddenly looked a little pale. "I hate you to say that. Not," she went on, though the gayety seemed a little hard and brilliant, "not that I object to proposals. They're excellent for a woman. I like to keep up a fair annual average. And I always have. But I like you too much to enjoy this. Oh, my dear boy, if I

had a daughter I'd give her to you. Oh, of course, you're quite right, I'm not old enough to have such a daughter."

"It only means that you don't like me well enough," he said slowly. "That's all, I know."

It was her turn to rise. She went across the terrace and stood for an instant with her back to him, while she gazed down the *Allée de Savoie*. Again the declining sun gilded the plane trees. But again too the world seemed filled with problems.

"I'm afraid," she said, without turning to him, "that it's because I'm in danger of liking you too much."

"I'm afraid I don't perceive that danger." He gave a little laugh which was a little hard and mocking. "Is there anybody else?" he asked.

She turned and leaned back against the terrace's balustrade. White chiffon and yellow and gold and the sun streaming about her! She looked absurdly young, quite preposterously pretty.

"There was perhaps some one else," she answered slowly, "though there's a danger that you may be making me forget him."

"Wouldn't you marry him?"

"I'll confess to you, Ottok. It will be good for me. He didn't ask me."

"I ask you. Don't you see how much nicer I am?" All his boyishness came back.

"I see at least how nice you are." She stood smiling at him. "Indeed you're—a great temptation."

"You wanted me to like you, fairly deliberately." He was sterner now.

"Yes. I tried to make you like me, yes, quite deliberately."

"*Et après,*" he asked, "what then?"

"Try to think I'm a snob," she suggested. "Think that I'm spoiled by the old silly fashion that we used to believe in before the war. Think that I've been accustomed even to royalties. Think that I'd perhaps consider it beneath me to marry the son of a corn merchant in Eastern Petronalia."

He took the blow without flinching, indeed, for an instant it passed through the lady's mind that he was almost offensively unperturbed. But this thought passed, as he began again, gravely:

"But you don't believe really in those things any longer. You don't believe in royalties now."

"No, I don't," she answered. "I very often seem a fool," she went on, "but I am not. I think as well as other people. Better than some even. I believe in the future. As to believing in the past, I believe in the past of Lanesville, Ohio, as my grandfather told me about it before I'd even heard of New York. I believe in America. Indeed I'm even considering living there, and that would have been going far in the old days. I even believe—oh, it's an agony to say anything so banal—but, yes, I believe in democracy."

"That's why I love you."

"I hope," she protested, "that is not altogether why."

"It is," he agreed, "not altogether why. But where are we?" he went on. "I love you and you say I am—a temptation, and yet you will not marry me. What is the next move?"

He took a step towards her. The next move, it

might have appeared to an impartial observer, was to be to kiss her. But he stopped. She began to speak, and her eyes were soft and dewy.

"Ottok," she said, "I am glad you've asked me to marry you and I am glad that you asked nothing else. I am quite aware that in certain circles in Europe there are emergencies when the formalities of marriage are dispensed with, but somehow I've never been quite willing to face that. Americans are often very odd—and very good. You've been also very good. I thank you. Let's not talk about this kind of thing any more or ever again."

"Then you'll marry me!" he rejoined. "That's all right."

"Oh, dear," she said. "You don't really suppose I'll marry you, do you? I don't *mean* to. And yet I'm quite determined you shan't marry any one else. I'm a mere dog in the manger."

CHAPTER VII

THE train from Geneva, due at Delices-les-Bains at two thirty, arrived that day only three hours late. This was phenomenal, it was a good omen, it seemed to indicate an approaching return to antebellum conditions when once or twice a year the train used to come in actually on time.

Among the last to descend from a crowded compartment were the ancient Churak and the well-groomed ex-Majesty of Constantia-Felix.

"I hope," said Georges, "that in time you can accommodate yourself to my democratic habits, Churak. If we had paid for the whole compartment as usual I should have missed the acquaintance of the two gentlemen from St. Gall who traveled in underwear and lace goods. You shudder, Churak; so do I. But this is the New World.

"I am going up to the Hotel de Russie while you get us rooms at the Beaurivage. Or somewhere else. Let us not do things by halves. Why not go to some unspeakably cheap and filthy lodging? Our Majesty will dispense with a *salon*. Why, indeed, should I have even a bed? If we can only save money enough I intend to have a bottle of champagne for dinner at the Casino to-night. No, you think we oughtn't to be so extravagant as to dine there? Well then, *you* at least shan't. By the Lord, Churak, you've been talk-

ing economy and price of beefsteak so much lately, that I'm determined to save. I think perhaps *you* had better have no dinner at all. Indeed the weather's good, why shouldn't you sleep on a bench in the Park?"

Such speeches might be taken to indicate a fair degree of high spirits, even in a creature like Georges who was very subject to cheerfulness. But after he had dismissed the unhappy and rebellious old Count and was himself walking slowly up the *Allée de Savoie* he seemed invaded by some of the evening's melancholy. He sat down once on a stone bench, took a telegram out of his pocket and read it and after slowly putting it back traced with his cane a few aimless designs in the gravel of the path before he started on.

The telegram was from Miss Lydia Smith. It said:

"Please come and take me home. I'm so unhappy."

"Poor little Lydia!" he murmured and yet he smiled, too, as if nothing could be wrong that a wise father could not set right with a word. And yet Georges was neither a fool nor fatuous, as men go.

At the hotel he discovered that Mrs. Hastings had gone out, but that Miss Lydia Smith was at home and would receive her father, Mr. Georges Smith, as he suddenly realized that he must now be.

She stood tremulously expectant in the little drawing-room as he was ushered in. He paused a moment; it was in genuine admiration.

"How pretty you look, my dear!" he exclaimed. "And the waist! You couldn't reasonably wish it to be any smaller. Come now, could you?"

This struck, one would have said, just the right note. Yet all the answer that the little Princess Lydia

made was to run across the room and into her father's arms, where, poor child, she had so rarely been. She took at its full value the promise he had made her only a little while ago, that his waistcoat would be the place where she could always lay that yellow head of hers and cry. The yellow head was more prettily coiffed than ever before. And yet tears are always salt and bitter, even from the loveliest blue eyes.

"There, there, my dear," he murmured, patting her a little awkwardly, just as any unroyal father might have done.

"I'm so glad you're here, Papa. The world isn't as nice as I thought it was going to be."

"Poor little modern girl," he said with affectionate sarcasm. "Poor Miss Smith."

"Don't make fun of me, Papa. I'm very unhappy."

"Yes, I know," he answered soothingly.

"You know?" She seemed a little surprised as she looked up at him through her tears.

"I am, my dear, a very wise fellow. So I know. Shall I tell the story?"

She disengaged herself and dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief which, so even in this emotional moment Georges observed, was prettier than any she had ever had before.

"A certain small princess met a young man she liked."

"How did you guess that, Papa?"

"Just my wisdom, dear. And so the little princess let herself drift away with the tide, and the tide was setting towards the islands of Romance."

"Yes, Papa." She wiped away a tear.

"Of course," Georges continued, "the girl couldn't altogether forget that she was a princess in disguise and was away from her father's court in a miserable furnished villa, in a way upon her parole of honor. She knew that the young man was only a bourgeois merchant's son and that a marriage with him was out of the question, since it would displease the girl's wonderful father to whom she really wished to give all the obedience consistent with being quite modern and independent. So when she found the current setting towards those islands was too strong for her she grew frightened. She was still in love with the young man and he with her. But she was afraid of her father. Now suppose that her father can make it all right."

"But you can't, Papa. You don't understand at all. The story doesn't go the way you've told it."

"But aren't you in love with the young man?"

"No. Certainly not!" And she began afresh to cry.

"Isn't he in love with you?"

"No," Miss Smith managed to say. "Not a bit."

"But he *must* be in love with somebody," ejaculated Georges, impatiently, "at his age."

"He is," agreed Miss Smith, and she flung herself down on the sofa and for an instant buried her face in its cushions.

Georges looked at first puzzled, then apprehensive, then frankly perturbed. Against a pale lemon yellow twilight sky there came slowly up the little path to the pink terrace two figures, a young man and a lovely lady. The Majesty of Constantia-Felix stepped impatiently to the door.

"Oh, sir," cried Mrs. Hastings very prettily, sinking in a curtsy, "you surprise and honor us."

And then, "May I be permitted to present—"

"I already have the honor," said the king, with cold formality.

Young Mr. Morpurgo was blushing heavily. But he pulled himself into some kind of a salute.

"I came, Your Majesty, you see," he stammered.

"Yes," replied Georges IV, still glacial, "you seem to have come pretty far, Prince Otto."

"Prince Otto!" screamed both ladies.

"Of Hellenos?" added Mrs. Hastings.

The creature nodded his head in shame. The dragon took both men in with a glance of scorn.

"Oh, you—you two devils!" she half gasped. "Though that's not half enough to call you. Oh, Lydia! Lydia!" she cried, turning to the girl. "My poor, deceived, tricked child. I can't think whether they've treated me worse than you or you worse than me."

"I can't see," said Lydia with some acerbity and a good deal of good sense, "that they have done *you* any harm."

"Not done me harm?" exclaimed the lady in question. "They've played with me, made a fool of me. I shall cable to Washington to the President. No, I won't. I'll make the American eagle scream all by myself far better than he could. You'd better go, Lydia dear. This will soon be no place for you. But remember that I love you, Lydia Smith, and everything's a mistake. Men especially are a mistake. Royalties above all! You shall come back to New York

and marry a nice broker. Go, my dear," she rattled on as she almost pushed Miss Smith out of the door, "and even if you hear them scream don't come to their rescue. Oh!" she concluded, as alone now she turned with heightened color and snapping eyes to their Royal Highnesses.

They looked rather sheepishly at each other.

"Fire away," at last said Georges IV.

"Call us whatever you like," pleaded the late Mr. Morpurgo.

For just a quarter of an instant she still stood angrily. And then slowly seating herself, she merely smiled at them, and shook her head commiseratingly. With an air of infinite leisure and detachment, she adjusted the chiffon flounces of her skirt.

"You foolish creatures!" she murmured. And she lit a cigarette, while they watched her as fascinated and doomed white rabbits might a lovely serpent.

Georges IV was the first to pull himself into some semblance of royal dignity.

"May I ask—?" he began.

"I was told to save your daughter from undesirable young men. I did. But," and she turned a radiant smile upon Prince Otto, "there was no one to save me from Mr. Morpurgo."

"I am a fool," remarked Georges almost bitterly. "Still let us get things clear."

"By all means, Your Royal Highness. This other Highness thinks he's in love with me."

"It's intolerable—" began Constantia-Felix.

"He doesn't find it so," said the lady.

"I've asked her to be my wife," said the young Prince Otto, standing very stiff.

"And of course now she refuses and the episode's over and better over."

"I stand quite ready to refuse you, Ottok, if I have your permission to do so. You've turned out to be the Heir to the throne of Hellenos, if there is one. But you must believe me that *I* thought you were just Morpurgo. This is no trap laid to catch a prince."

The boy strode across to the window and stood a moment with his back to them. Then he turned and broke out violently to the king.

"There is a trap laid for me, however, and by you, sir. You're trying to turn me against her just because she did what was decent, brave and sporting. She was guardian of a princess and she guarded."

"Ah, but this is nice of you, *mon prince*," murmured the lady softly.

"What difference does it make to me how I met her, or why she made me fall in love with her? I have met her, I have fallen in love with her. Mrs. Hastings, I repeat my offer. Will you take me?"

"She's far too intelligent a woman," protested Georges, "not to know that it's impossible. Even if it weren't for your age—"

"Your Majesty is so unwise to rub in the difference in our ages," from Mrs. Hastings with quite the air of disinterested advice.

"I beg your pardon if for a moment I thought of you as a more suitable bride for—for an older man."

Prince Otto shot a sudden glance at the king as if an unpleasant suspicion crossed his mind. His shoul-

ders straightened. He looked ready for combat. Georges went on:

"There is also to be considered—"

"Please don't say his position," interrupted the lady. "I think Your Majesty made it quite clear to me in a previous—audience—ought I to say? that you feel marriage quite out of the question between royalty and the likes of me. And of course I should insist on marriage. And there you are!"

"I have the honor again, madame, to ask your hand." It was Prince Otto speaking.

"Oh, I wish I knew what to do," said the lady, very pathetically, but somehow with the air of knowing, privately, exactly what to do.

"I think—" she began, and then paused, observing delicately, but with satisfaction, the torment to which she was subjecting both gentlemen.

"May I beg," finally broke forth the older of them, "five minutes alone with you before you come to any conclusion."

"I object," began the younger man.

"Oh," said the lady. "*He* isn't going to ask me to marry him. He doesn't believe in that sort of thing."

"May I suggest to you, my dear young man, that if it had been possible for a member of a European reigning house to marry Mrs. Hastings some one would have tried long before you?"

"Tried?" asked Otto, with a note of sarcasm. "I'm wondering what they called trying."

"It didn't consist in asking *me*, at any rate," she said. "It's but simple justice to you, Otto, to say that you're the first to make a definite and legitimate

proposal." Her voice became more serious. "I shan't forget that, dear boy. Your cause won't suffer by anything that happens if you leave me alone a minute with an old friend. And whether I take you or refuse you in the end it will be because I believe that way lies greater happiness for you. You've won that much of my heart."

She held out her hand to him and he kissed it.

"I shall wait on the terrace till you send for me, if it's all night," he said and rushed out with boyish swiftness as if he felt more emotion than he wanted any one to see just then.

"It's turned cold," said the lady after a little pause. "Would you put a match to the fire?"

For a fleeting instant of royal pride he seemed to meditate ringing for a servant, then under her little mocking smile he knelt to the humble task.

"Two old people by the fire, eh?"

"Rubbish!" retorted Georges. "We're neither of us forty."

"He's not thirty and she's not twenty."

The wood crackled as it caught and he rose.

"You are not in love with him, are you?"

"I'm touched by him, pleased by him. Why shouldn't I be in love with him? Or why should I? In any case, from your point of view, he's an admirable match, isn't he?"

"Haven't you a heart?" asked Georges.

"A heart?" she answered. "Yes. But a man must try to find it. Have you a right to know?"

He slumped into a big bechintzed and becushioned chair by the small fire, quite regardless of nice man-

ners, and for a silent moment gazed at it while she stood and gazed at him.

"No," he said finally and he looked up at her with a smile not quite so gay as was generally his smile. "Kings have no right to any knowledge of the human heart. Perhaps they couldn't go on with their poor little *metier* of being kings if they had. I've felt that I must consider the tradition of my race rather than the feelings of my own heart. I've felt, even now—now perhaps more than ever—that I must play the farce out. Now more than ever I feel disinclined to. More than ever I want to try my chances against that nice decent boy who's fallen in love with you, as of course he should, and of whom I'm jealous."

He rose. Again the fire crackled in the soft silence.

"Am I a fool?" he asked at last.

"Not quite," she said.

"I'm afraid I am. I'm afraid I'm *going to be*—quite."

Perhaps he would have been—quite. There was a determined reckless look in his eyes that contrasted oddly with the usual lazy smile. Again he took a step towards her. We shall never know just how many steps he might have taken, nor how far he might have gone. At that moment there was almost a clatter outside. Prince Otto pulled the door upon the terrace open, and the old Count Churak almost staggered into the room. He was winded, he was breathing heavily yet, somehow, he was not quite the comic figure that he had seemed by the *Lac des Alpes*. Something had happened which again ranged the great centuries behind him.

"Your Majesty," he began. "It has come. Thank God, it's come."

The air in the snug soft sitting-room grew electric, tense.

"What, Churak?" asked Georges; yet, as if already he knew, he unconsciously stood straighter, more like a king.

"There was a telegram at the Hotel Beaurivage. Our friends have risen at last. They are in possession of Lichtenmont, and five provinces have declared for you. And the representatives of the new government are already on their way now to the *Lac des Alpes* to offer you your crown. We must be there to-morrow morning."

"Can we be?" asked Georges.

"I have a motor at the door. We can be if we drive all night. And they say that the Great Pass is clear of snow."

"Then we will start at once." His Majesty of Constantia-Felix put his hand on his servant's shoulder. "You have done well, old Churak. But will not the all-night run be too hard for you?"

"I will go, sire, if it kills me. I must be with you when justice is done."

"There, there, you shall," promised the king. And his arm went, unroyally perhaps, around both shoulders of his ancient chamberlain. The result was unexpected, for the old man suddenly broke down and, though he fought hard, for a few seconds his half stifled sobs were the only sound in the small firelit room. And during that little period the little Princess

of Constantia-Felix stole in and stood, wide-eyed, watching.

His Majesty turned to his old friend from across the seas.

"You see," he said lightly, "Fate is perhaps deciding for me—that I am to be quite a fool. 'Lydia,' he went on, to his child, "will you, if Mrs. Hastings will bring you, start for the *Lac des Alpes* to-morrow? We are, perhaps, to go home to Lichtenmont. You think you do not want to go, but perhaps, somehow, after all, I can make you happy there, my child. Not that your happiness or mine has much importance, dear. Just now and forever afterwards, whatever happens, what matters is our country's happiness."

It was perhaps a historic moment which was passing thus in this suite of the Hotel de Russie. We have, however, already recorded all the strictly historic words there spoken. They were somewhat enigmatic, in that they seemed to give no clew as to any project in His Majesty of Constantia-Felix's mind as regards the matrimonial chances of his offspring.

"I'll bring her on to Geneva," said Mrs. Hastings. "And probably neither she nor I will be marrying any one for the next day or two. At any rate I think I owe this to Lydia, that she should be married first."

Both Georges and Otto considered this statement, but to them it seemed to lead nowhere.

Otto again threw open the door and the men went out. The motor whirled away in the darkness and the women knew that Georges was on the road. Was it the road to Lichtenmont?

CHAPTER VIII

ALL through the night the motor whirred towards the *Lac des Alpes*. A crescent new moon scudded through scattering clouds. Georges IV eyed it warily. Did it, he asked himself, mean hope? Somehow, now that the thing he had longed for ever since that night at Lichtenmont had happened—but a new moon is in any case a pretty thing. Clouds, too.

They stopped towards midnight at the little *Auberge des Grisons* where it was a real pleasure to rout out the innkeeper and make him give them jugs filled with boiling water to pack about poor old Churak in the car—the Great Pass was clear of snow, it was true, but the night air was very bitter. It was almost as great a pleasure to drink a generous cup of a kind of pear brandy native in that canton and not to be neglected by thoughtful drinkers. But soon the motor was again eating up the long empty road. They crossed the pass and slid down the valley that leads finally to this lake.

Count Churak, so cozily juggled—if one may correctly employ that phrase—did not speak. And Georges of Constantia-Felix, peering at the road and at the night without seeming to see them, fell deeper and deeper into his own thoughts. It is quite possible

that he had never thought so much before. But even stories must not intrude too far upon a hero's privacy. Sometimes the mountains reminded him of the Garpentian Range in the eastern provinces that were no longer his. Sometimes a pine against the sky made him think of Christmases at Lichtenmont when his grandfather, old Charles X, was still alive. Then jumped the years to that last night of good-by, and to this new night of welcome when Constantia-Felix was, so it seemed, to take him back. What would she take back, unhappy, racked, yet lovely land? What manner of king could Georges IV ever hope to be? There are moments when the thoughts of kings are long, long thoughts. We will instead merely follow the longish road that leads down from the Great Pass to the sapphire lake. The cold moderated as the motor descended to pleasant lower levels, to vineyards, to sunrise and to coffee and rolls at the little capital, on the terrace of a café by the lakeside, where a sleepy waiter lazily and unwillingly wiped off a tin table, little realizing that it was for the *petit déjeuner* of a king.

By ten they were at the Château de Branchazay, which instead of sitting peacefully as usual in the sun, was already humming with the emissaries of all the dethroned gentlemen at the Lake District. Events in Constantia were, it was hoped, a torch lit which would start fires of royalism in all the countries now oppressed, so these exiles phrased it, by democracy. It was the decision of the Council of Montresor, hastily called together the night before, a little earlier than

when His Majesty of Constantia-Felix had been drinking pear brandy at the *Auberge des Grisons*, to request Georges IV to receive the delegation from Lichtenmont at the Island of Montresor itself, instead of his own modest Château of Branchazay, and in the company of his fellow sovereigns who, it was hoped, would, glittering with gems and orders and gold lace, thus lend to the first Restoration all the *éclat* of a first-rate historic event. It was hoped, obviously, that the repercussion (a charming European word, too little used by us in America) of such a party would enormously aid their own publicity and propaganda at home. Indeed, it was urgently and rather pathetically put to the Constantian Georges that, since they had all fallen together, he should do all in his power to enable them to rise together. It was the opinion of Count Churak, whose importance now almost surpassed that of any unseated monarch, that this procedure would be quite contrary to tradition.

"I point out to you, Churak, that tradition landed us where we are. No, I'll do what they want. I've certain things to say to the Constantian delegation which it might do them all good to hear. Fix the show for nine o'clock to-night and for the love of God let me have some champagne for dinner."

There were quaint minor events which, much more than the action of the Council of Montresor, made the possible return to Lichtenmont seem real. The local butcher at Larentonville sent up his bill to date, although it was only the twentieth of the month. And the estate agent telephoned from Geneva asking when Branchazay was likely to be free. There had been,

the evening before, it appeared, a little revolutionary trouble in Styrditzia and the Grand Duke needed a Swiss place in rather of a hurry and there was nothing on the lake but the gardener's cottage on Prince Cezar of Illyria's place. Now unfortunately Hazelinda of Cromatzi, the Grand Duke's somewhat plain sister, had been slightly married to Cezar before he became so interested in the Parisian stage and she returned—to the great distress of every one except her husband—to live with her brother in the family palace at Prymzichoval. So this hut, the real estate agent judged, was, on account of these family complications, out of the question; and he welcomed the news from Constantia-Felix which seemed to point to a fresh tenant and a fresh commission.

The new Trieste-Constantinople express *de luxe* (although there is precious little *luxe* about it) arrived at Lausanne at seven-thirty, and the Constantian committee was almost at once transferred to a launch belonging to Stefan of Illyria—the one with the cook-wife—who thus courteously indicated how happy Constantia could be with Illyria if she could but induce the latter country to call him back.

The twilight still lingered over the *Lac des Alpes* and a moon still young hung in the western sky. The air was soft and the little island of Montresor with its fairy-like palace of white marble seemed fantastically almost to float upon the lake's placid waters. From various points along the green shores little launches—royal puff-puffs—darted forth, converging upon the isle of counsel, small ill-smelling *petrol* craft

but heavily freighted with hopes, worthy and unworthy. The concert of Europe tuned up, though the hero of the evening, Georges IV, looked oddly pale and nervous, not elated and triumphant as might a king homeward bound.

Yet the paleness and the look in his face consorted better perhaps than his habitual gayety might have with the solemnity of the moment. The grand salon of the Empress was lit by hundreds of candles, an extravagance that had not been indulged in there since Her Majesty's ball to the King Exon early in that fateful summer of 1914. Again kings glittered as of old, and when the doors were flung open and the delegation of humble Constantian subjects advanced towards their monarch, who detached himself from the waiting group, brightest of bright stars, for an instant it seemed that, in its flight, Time had indeed turned back.

There was something in the air, some faint fragrance of the loyalties of an earlier time. One old gentleman broke down and sobbed as he fell on his knees to kiss the hand of his royal master. Even the stout, stubborn young man with a red beard who represented the new Democratic Law and Order Party in Constantia, bent his head, as if even for him there was some transitory romantic magic in the summer night, though the acceptance of royalty by him and his party was only a temporary compromise made necessary by the break-down of communistic government at Lichtenmont.

The candles flickered gaily in the soft warm breeze that occasionally stole into the Empress's Grand Salon

from off the lake. And Georges IV of Constantia spoke.

"There are some small things," he began, "I want to say, from the old régime to the new. For since I left, so hurriedly, my capital—your capital, I should say—of Lichtenmont I have had many long days to meditate in—dull days, sad days most of them, but excellent for thought. If I go back, as you seem to ask of me, I shall go back to the new régime not the old. I do not approve of the old régime. It produced bad kings. We were all," and he turned with an almost intolerable suave politeness to his fellow-monarchs, "I make the statement deliberately, we were all bad kings."

A faint murmur, of varying significance and quality, ran over the room.

"Shall we make good kings?" he asked, and his voice cut into the growing babble and there was silence again.

"I do not venture to answer for you, my brothers. You may do that if delegations like this should ever come to you."

Was there a touch of pride here that he should be the first asked home? Yet Georges was, in this moment of his humility, more pleasingly, more romantically royal than ever before.

"For myself," he went on, "I cannot say that I am very sure to make the king I ought. If my daughter, if some one else, not even of my family is likely to make a better sovereign I would beg Constantia-Felix so to choose. No one with a sense of humor," he said, and his eye ranged mockingly over the Concert,

"can still think kings divine—we least of all who know them best. But," and again he grew serious, "perhaps kingship is divine—the right to lead a people to happiness. That I have come to see during the hours when I was bored. And it is perhaps too great a strain upon my credulity to believe that I can carry kingship as it should be carried upon my unworthy shoulders."

Again the murmur ran through the Empress's Grand Salon and a little puff of wind, suddenly intruding upon these sacred and royal presences, blew out some of the candles. In a gloomier light and an even lower voice Georges of Constantia went on.

"I will be even more honest. It is an odd sensation for a king—I wonder if any of you has ever tried it. I am thinking of myself. You cannot learn to think about the rights of subjects without thinking about your own rights. Are we not in this new world subjects—subjects of the people? A pretty idea, *hein?* Perhaps being a king is not my *metier*. Perhaps I want to be happy too.

"I will tell you what I want, friends from Constantia, and then it will be for you to say whether you still want to call me back.

"I am going to-morrow to Geneva to ask a lady to be my wife. She is not eligible by the old rules to be a queen. She is only a citizen of the Great Democracy of the West, of America. She is, to my taste, more like what a queen should be than are most queens. But the chief thing is—and I apologize for bringing forward such a vulgar reason—I am much attached to her and have been for years. I should

dislike to seem grandiloquent, but I think I want my happiness, even at the cost of my throne."

Disguise it as he might with light phrases, it was an abdication. Describe it as inadequately as we may, it was yet a historic moment, a milestone on the European road towards the future.

There was a silence first, then a faint buzzing, such as might grow into a storm. By the doorway, below the startled angry kings, the Constantian delegation put their heads together, and there was almost a half minute's confused discussion. Then the young man with a red beard pushed his way angrily through his companions and strode towards Georges, who once had been his king but was now just a man like another and at his mercy. His Majesty—let us for a moment still call him that—turned, pale but still smiling, to meet red-beard.

"Well?" he asked, quite simply.

CHAPTER IX

THE young man with the red beard spoke with all the firmness which his countenance indicated.

"I don't know what the others think, Your Majesty; I consider it very *chic*. Your decision puts Constantia-Felix in the front rank of modern democratic states. I am glad you have chosen a woman of the people. I would welcome her if she were a red Indian or a simple cow-girl of the Far West."

Georges meditated a moment in surprise. He thought of his *inamorata's* costumes from the Rue de la Paix.

"She is scarcely as you so optimistically describe her," he admitted. "The lady is more—shall I say?—an *internationale*."

"*Internationale* is good," said the young man with the red beard. "That will please the radicals."

"I fear," said Georges, "and I beg you to believe that it is a matter which does not interest me and has not been investigated by me, but I fear she is something of a capitalist."

Human nature is, of course, not what it should be. His Majesty's phrase seemed to galvanize the whole assemblage to new vitality. At the sound of it the Constantian delegation at once came forward nearer their king; now suddenly they were warmed, so it

seemed, by a more intimate personal feeling for him. As for the ex-Sovereigns of Europe they moved as one man, as if some spell drew them magically, as if already the melodious clink of American dollars were making lovely music in their ears. A servant was closing some of the windows and relighting the candles; already the world seemed more cheerful.

"This is important, Your Majesty," began the ancient count, who represented the extreme right, the reactionary royalist party of Constantia-Felix. "The Constantian treasury—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Georges, "I am giving thought to the matter for the first time, but I already see that if the lady marries she will be marrying me, not the Constantian treasury."

"Obviously," said another of the delegation—the head of the Black Sea Bank at Lichtenmont—"but the Constantian Treasury might be relieved of your personal allowance—"

"I am not at all sure that the lady will take me—" suggested Georges.

At first the Constantians seemed perturbed at this thought. Perhaps they saw in the background Miguel of Exzenia, only twenty-five, twist confidently a minute black mustache. Perhaps they heard Heinrich Albert mutter darkly, "Most likely she won't."

For an instant the fair be-dollared American may have seemed to elude them. Then the sight of Georges, erect, slight, handsome, with the gay gallant air which had always so far attracted ladies gave them courage. Forty though he might be, they felt ready to pit him against all royal comers for this unknown American

lady's hand. With a murmur of deprecation and wavings of the hands they expressed their confidence in him.

"How rich is she?" asked one of the Princes of Illyria, all children of nature.

The assemblage was hushed. Yet Georges IV only answered in a very bored voice:

"I have so little idea. She keeps the wolf from the door."

"It will not be difficult to know," said the ex-King of Romalia, sharply, "if you care to go so far as to give us her name. We have always in Romalia kept excellent track of all the marriageable American fortunes. We have always encouraged our younger nobility to go out there after wives. When they left for New York they had very carefully revised lists, and our minister at Washington was always instructed to aid them. The results were excellent. Almost eighty-seven per cent. of those who went out brought back excellent financial results."

"This is most painful—" began Georges.

"But important," interrupted the young man with the red beard. "Would Your Majesty favor us with her name?"

"Under the circumstances," hesitated our king, "I almost dislike giving it. But no," he went on with a sudden energy and a quick standing erect proudly, "I am glad to give it. The lady is Florence Hastings, née Denison, widow of the late Alfred Hastings of New York."

The Constantian delegation, it was evident, did not know Mrs. Hastings. But her name was like a bomb

thrown among the monarchs. It blew up first the King of Hellenos, old Gregorius, as his son somewhat disrespectfully termed him. Fairly sputtering with excitement he pushed his way towards Georges.

"What makes you think she will take you, you old Georges?" he called out in an angry raucous voice.

Georges smiled, shrugged his shoulders and bowed from the waist. What else could a gentleman do?

"I understand my son Otto has a pretty good chance," went on the older man. Georges stared in amazement at him.

"You don't suppose for a moment that I allow my son to go rampaging around Europe without some one to keep an eye on him? I had a complete report on the affair of Delices-les-Bains. My son is a good bet for place in this race, let me tell you, if he is only an heir-apparent. He's a younger man than you, my boy."

"He is, as I have every reason to know," confessed His Majesty of Constantia. "You will note that I admitted I was not sure Mrs. Hastings would accept me. Prince Otto of Hellenos has the honor to be the chief reason why I was not sure."

"I am glad you admit that," said old Gregorius, still sputtering. And then he turned to his fellow monarchs and continued in a shrill, angry, old voice. "My friends," he cried, "the Council of Montresor is asked to break the sacred obligation we all entered into to uphold the tradition in our marriages. And we are asked to break it in order that Constantia-Felix instead of Hellenos may carry away one of the biggest American fortunes!"

"Have you the figures?" asked the King of Romalia.

"Naturally I have," said old Gregorius, fumbling in the breast pocket of his coat. "I am not a fool. Here we are. These are what was laid before my privy council at a vermouth meeting at the Café du Nord yesterday. The Hastings money is extremely well invested, though there is perhaps a shade too large a proportion in Lehigh Valley and Public Utilities. I should say it is one of the best American fortunes."

"Tut, tut," said the old Archduke of Wallankia. "Give us the sum total."

Old Gregorius tantalizingly delayed to adjust a pair of spectacles. In this pause readers are invited to note the lack of vulgarity in this narrative which has so far dictated that nothing should have been said about our American heroine's money. The moment, however, cannot longer be postponed. The moment furthermore was one which perhaps changed the course of history in all southeastern Europe.

"The amount is forty-eight millions, about four hundred and sixty-eight thousand dollars, and a few hundreds—*that* our advices are not quite accurate about. Of this in fluid assets there are—"

"Ach, Himmel," groaned Karl of Saxreich. "The injustice this war has inflicted on Germany! To think it will be years before a German can again marry an American dollar-princess!"

"Oh, God above," cried one of the Princes of Illyria, "she is worth two hundred and eighty million *konitskis* in Illyrian money, or three billion eight hundred million *konitskis* at the present rate of exchange!"

"I wonder how she would feel about my morganatic marriage. Of course it is really no bar to my taking a princess," mused Stefan, "but I am told these Americans are very prudish about extra wives."

"You say that trying to bar me," retorted the Sultan of Zambifor. "I am not a Christian. In *my* country the position of twenty-third wife is considered very *chic*."

"I have the honor to demand of the most noble and royal Council of Montresor"—it was old Ludovicz of Romalia speaking—"the permission for my son Claude-Ergone to seek the hand of this lady in marriage."

This roused the Constantians. The young man with the red beard bellowed angrily:

"This is a matter in which the people must be consulted. We get this money. Our man saw her first."

"Very good," yelled old Gregorius in reply. The barriers between sovereigns and people were certainly broken down at last. The Grand Salon of the Empress had now the tone of a village market-place when a group of excited peasants bargain over a live squealing pig.

"You say your man saw her first," and the ex-King of Hellenos shook his fist almost in the beard of the young man. "Yes, he saw her first," he continued in fury, "but who proposed to her first? Was it not my son?"

Here Georges IV, pale with rage, cut into the discussion, speaking in a low cutting voice.

"Gregorius," he said, "you are intolerably ill-bred. And besides," he added, "what do you know of whether your precious Otto has or has not proposed?"

"I know enough," was the reply. "I had two special agents with field glasses behind a hedge."

"Did you install dictaphones in the lady's sitting-room?"

"No, but I wish I had!" said Gregorius.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen—" began the old Archduke of Wallankia.

"There are no gentlemen here," shouted Red Beard, "only kings and proletarians."

The Archduke gazed at the young man in silence for a moment, then he went on.

"You are treating this as if it were a personal matter."

"It is intensely personal to me," protested Georges.

The old Archduke smiled paternally. "Be a statesman!" he said. "Remember that this is an international question. Remember that it involves the relations of our countries to America. Whichever country first accepts an American queen will probably be very well thought of by the American people. Whichever of us first has an American wife will probably get back on his throne first. At the Concert of Europe this Council cannot permit one of its number to get ahead of the others like this. No, no!"

"Do you mean," asked Georges, "that she must marry all or none of us? I must warn you that on these terms she's quite likely to marry none. Great Heavens!" he went on. "I expect that there are probably five million unmarried women in America!"

"But have they all three billion eight hundred million *komitskis* at the present rate of exchange?" asked one of the Princes of Illyria.

King Gregorius again consulted his paper. "There were in the spring of 1914," he said, "only 15,689 heiresses in the United States who brought with them over \$400,000."

"I am old"—it was the ancient Archduke, placidly pursuing his train of thought, unperturbed by interruption—"that is, I am seventy. I have not been married for years. And yet in the interests of my Wal-lankian people I stand ready to marry this—this—what did you say her name was, Georges?"

There was an instant turmoil in which it became evident that there were several more candidates proposing their names. Then suddenly some one thumped on the table with a gavel and the voice was heard, above the din, of M. Théophile Braun, the representative appointed by the government at Berne to be present at the meetings of the Council of Montresor, so that these gatherings should not involve the Swiss Republic in any European difficulties.

"Your Majesties," yelled Monsieur Théophile, "I must protest against Switzerland being excluded from this opportunity. You must not trample on the rights of neutrals. We have fine upstanding young Swiss, any one of whom would make an admirable husband for a rich Americaness. I demand that this lady be permitted to consider one of them!"

"Holland will protest, too," began some one.

"And what will America say?" asked very pertinently the King of Romalia.

"We can always cable to Colonel House," suggested some one else.

The turmoil rose higher. It was evident that the

Concert of Europe produced the most modern of music, with many discords. It was obvious that it would soon be necessary to separate the second Prince of Illyria and the young man with the red beard, who seemed inclined to settle matters by the simple method of *le boxe anglais*. At last, somehow, Georges of Constantia rose above the storm.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "there is but one person who can settle this—the lady herself."

"Where is she?" asked His Majesty of Romalia.

"At the Beaurivage in Geneva."

"Let her be sent for at once."

"To-night! To-night!" The turmoil rose again.

Georges IV consulted his watch.

"Why not?" he asked. "It is nine-thirty. She will have finished dinner."

"Meanwhile," said Heinrich Albert, "I feel a need of food. I have had nothing for two hours. There are, I am told, the usual sandwiches in the dining-salon. And"—he paused at the climax—is it not almost the climax of our tale?—"I have to-day had sent here a barrel of *echt Münchener* just from over the border."

CHAPTER X

ABOUT a half hour later two ladies sat alone, concluding a conversation, at the prow of the little launch of the Prince of Illyria, which sped through the warm soft night towards the lovely fabled island of Montresor. Farther aft the heir of Hellenos (if he could get Hellenos back) smoked a "Fortunate Dromedary" cigarette. For a day neither of the ladies had had much to say to him. He had indeed been almost tempted to bare his heart to Miss Bidgerton, who though bedewed with tears, still exists in our story. Now he meditated, in a chastened spirit, on life and its uncertainties.

"Lydia," said the elder lady, "I hope you understand now."

"I understand," was the reply, "and I truly forgive you."

"I wish things were as if we'd never gone to Delices-les-Bains."

The girl made no comment at first. She seemed to watch the twinkling tiny Swiss towns on the dark shore of the *Lac des Alpes*.

"No," she said, "I don't think so. Miss Lydia Smith was rather silly, as young girls are. The Princess Lydia, if I must be that again, is grown up. And I shall be happy somehow—you'll see."

Yes, she looked older, in the crescent moon's faint light.

The older woman leaned forward and took the girl's hand, and said, perhaps unexpectedly:

"You know, dear, you're lovely at last. Is it tears I wonder that make so wonderful a lotion?"

And the little Princess Lydia replied quite frankly:

"I'm glad, whatever happens, that I'm prettier, and that my waist is not quite so large."

They were nearing the little *Isle de Montresor* and the unknown future and the odd unexplained conference to which they had been hurriedly summoned. At the stern Prince Otto's glowing cigarette had disappeared; he was coming towards them. But before he came there was between the ladies a final interchange.

"I've told you everything, Lydia. And you understand that I love him."

"I understand," said the little princess. "I love him, too."

At Geneva no explanations had been given or asked. But now, as the old Count Churak, who was waiting at the dock, led Mrs. Hastings ceremoniously up the white marble steps that led to the terrace of the villa, her conversational tone was not at all what he considered suitable for the future—well, for the what?

"Why am I summoned before the Council?" she asked. "I can only think of, wasn't it Phryne? before the Tribunal. I've seen the picture. And her costume—well even now when one doesn't exactly

balk at *décolletage*, she went lengths that are out of the question. Though of course if I were to—”

The King of Romalia made the formal speech. And the scene was no longer the indecorous village market-place it had been.

“The present occasion, madame, has no historical parallel, but their history is no longer what it was. We are, or we were Europe. We hope to be Europe again. You, madame, are America. Now that I see you, I may add America at its best. Europe wishes to ally itself with the west. You are already aware that two countries, Hellenos and Constantia-Felix, wish to marry you.”

A faint smile flitted over her face, her color seemed to heighten a little.

“Oh,” she murmured, “does Constantia wish to marry me? I hadn’t quite understood.”

“But we wish you to know before you come to any conclusion that there are other countries which honorably sue your favor. I speak for my son, but in honor bound I speak for many others here. We ask the privilege of your acquaintance. We ask your consideration.”

Suddenly she looked confused, frightened, very young.

“Your Majesty, this isn’t a joke you are playing upon me?”

“On my honor as a gentleman,” he answered. And acquiescence was voiced from a score of throats. Her color surged back into her cheeks. She sank in a low curtsey.

"It is," she said, "even for America almost too great an honor. As to its being for me, it is unbelievable. The world is indeed changed."

"For the better, we hope," said His Majesty of Romalia, "if you accept any of us."

"I marry so rarely," murmured the lady. "In fact it has only happened to me once, and then for love. This is all very confusing. The thought of marrying a total stranger is for the moment almost frightening to me."

It was in vain that Miguel of Exzenia twisted his small mustache and tried to fix the lady with his eye. It was of no use that all the Princes of Illyria were manifestly melting at the sight of her.

"Will you think it horribly discourteous of me if I incline at this moment to those I already know? May I in fact ask that the Council of Montresor permit me to be alone for a few minutes with—"

She hesitated—out of pure mischievousness, no one could doubt it.

"With Prince Otto of Hellenos," she said at last.

For an instant one might have thought that the late King of Constantia-Felix had not heard. He stood very erect and very pale. Perhaps it was in his family to improve with age; like his daughter, he had never looked better than now. Are unshed tears as well a magic lotion? He did not seem to see anything but the candles and dark *Lac des Alpes* beyond. Yet the lady, oddly enough, was staring at him rather than at the heir of Hellenos, who, nearby, flushed and handsomely boyish, was poised almost as the young Mercury about to fly.

At last they were alone, and for at least a quarter of a minute silent.

"Do you still want to marry me, Otto?" she asked slowly.

"Did I not ask you?" He flushed a deeper red.

"That is, as you quite well know, not an accurate answer to my question. But I shall not press you. You saw me this afternoon after a hard day's motor-ing beginning at an intolerable hour. My appearance may well have led you to suspect the worst."

"I suspect nothing of you that is not beautiful and kind and good," he answered.

"Oh, dear, dear young Otto," she cried softly. "I hope, I so hope you're right about me. I so hope that what I'm doing now is the best thing for you. You—you must not marry me!"

"Must I not?" he asked gravely, though his eyes were suspiciously, boyishly wet. "Why not?"

"First because I am so much older than you."

He protested but she went on.

"I don't, of course, mean that I shall actually grow old. That's absurd nowadays. There are creams and lotions and massage. And modern surgery will lift the skin of your face and take out the wrinkles and the puffiness. It can carve down your hips they say, too. And your neck, with wax injected under the skin—"

"Oh, don't," he protested afresh. "It sounds horrible."

"It is horrible," she admitted. "But wouldn't I perhaps have to think of those things, with you lag-ging so far behind me in years?"

"You could never grow old."

"Well, perhaps I wouldn't. But I might—yes, at seventy-five or eighty I might begin to fade, ever so slightly."

"You don't really think all that matters. Do you?"

She paused a moment before she answered him and then she said slowly, "No, I don't think all that matters. Ah, you force me to give you my best reason. I'm really in love, in love with Georges of Constantia-Felix. I think I have been for fifteen years. But until now when, so it appears, he's asking me to marry him, I haven't allowed myself to think of it. Is that being puritanical? I'm afraid I am."

"I'm glad you are."

"That's nice of you, Otto. That's why, besides being young and handsome and a prince, you were a temptation to me. But I love him and it's better I should. For there's another good reason for my doing what I am. You're really in love with Lydia."

"Oh, you make me out a thing with no mind of my own!" he cried.

"No, I don't. I make you out just young and natural. You and she love the New World. You love freedom. Don't you see how wonderful all this is in a prince and a princess?"

"She does look prettier than ever before, doesn't she?" he said, and then he grew shy again.

"That isn't what I was talking about," said Mrs. Hastings, with a gay small laugh, "but yes, she *does*."

"Ah, but I wouldn't dare now—"

"Wouldn't dare because for a time you'd been led

astray by a good woman. Oh, she'll forgive that. She loves you."

"Oh, does she?" His eyes shone.

"Yes, she'll tell you so herself, if you'll give her a chance. And, Otto, she's a splendid girl."

He suddenly began to laugh.

"Why, you'll be my mother."

"Even that doesn't discourage me," she cried.

"If the Council will permit, I've made my choice," she said. "I'll take Constantia-Felix."

And in the Empress's Grand Salon Georges IV kissed her before them all. Within a half hour on the terrace Otto and the Princess Lydia too sealed a bargain in this way.

There is not much more to tell—just a pretty incident.

The Constantian delegation opened a box they had brought along and lo, there was in it a crown—diamonds and emeralds, and the great ruby of Azanoff. The young man with a red beard, already a hopeless victim to his future queen, dropped on his knees before her offering it.

She took it and lifted it to her head.

"Of course," she said in a low voice to Georges, "my hair's not dressed for a crown, and besides I've a really lovely tiara of my own. Still—"

The glitter of the candlelight was on her, and the spell of the moment caught every one there. It was a vision no one was ever to forget. Then slowly she lifted the bauble from her shining locks. She took a step forward.

"Listen, Constantians," she said, "and try to understand. My great-grandfather was a farmer—in Ohio. My grandfather made his money buying and selling cheese. I'm not a queen in the old sense. There is no crown of Constantia which belongs or can belong to me. It is yours. It is the people's."

She came nearer them, and the great Azanoff ruby shone upon them all.

"Will you take it and keep it for me so long as you love me, so long as you think I am the queen that there should be in Constantia? Will you not take back the crown? From Ohio to Constantia-Felix, eh? I love your king. If you will let me I mean to love you and Constantia, too."

It is in such episodes as this that the history of the King and Queen of Constantia is being made in Southeastern Europe.

The Little Miracle at Tlemcar

THE LITTLE MIRACLE AT TLEMCAR

AS I start to write the story I do not know whether I believe it now myself. I was there, in the city of Tlemcar, set in the green foothills of the southern slope of the Atlas Mountains. I knew everybody concerned, and the happening that now seems least credible I saw, or thought I saw, with my own eyes in the hot white court of Léon Gasquier's small house. But time elapsed and distance traversed dim the eyes of memory.

Tlemcar now sounds a little like a new make of automobile; once it stood for all the magic of Morocco, for white walls against which purple masses of bougainvillea clung, for little domes of mosques and minarets, for donkey trains coming from and going to the wild country and the desert where as yet it was safe for no Christian to go, and for a turmoil of strange dark races. In Morocco you have also always the lurking sense that here is where the religion of Mohammed must make a last desperate stand or be pushed by the Christian invaders into the very Atlantic.

This is a story of the two religions, but, oddly enough, it is of no fight, but rather of some dark understanding which sprang up between them at the touch of disbelief. Lucie Beaujoly, who wanted to

go into a convent, and old Abdullah, half holy man, half beggar at the Mogador Gate!

But this is an inconsecutive way to get on with a yarn.

I had drifted into Tlemcar because drifting is always so very pleasant and as well because it was then my mood to let both Europe and America fade, if I could, from waking thoughts and even dreams till I should see and feel and dream only this Africa of hot winds and strange odors and sad barbaric songs and its own fierce religion.

Thus in a pleasant though doubtless commonplace enough poetic way I explained myself to myself. Yet I lived not in any Moorish caravanserai, but at the little Hôtel de Paris, installed by the northern gate, and after a few days made great friends with young Léon Gasquier, the French civil authority at Tlemcar.

There is always a Hôtel de Paris or des Parisiens wherever the French go, and at Tlemcar there was by some obscure miracle an excellent chef. The patrons of the hotel were sure that he must be at least a fugitive from Parisian justice; no one else would bury such an admirable culinary talent by the edge of the Sahara's sand. Even young Gasquier, though he was a high-minded and conscientious official, was moved to declare in extravagant terms:

"I am a faithful servant of the republic, monsieur, but I am a Frenchman. I would not investigate the record of any one who can produce such omelets and such a *poulet poché à la Montesquiou*."

With such cooking and a sound little Algerian red wine it is no wonder that the French resident—so to

dignify his position—and I soon became friends. Outside the officers of the small military force of the district we were the only permanent eaters of the table d'hôte. And some instinctive sense of comradeship drew us civilians together. Gasquier was about twenty-nine, and in about a fortnight—by virtue of my extreme old age, the forties—I was calling him Monsieur Léon, an affectionate and intimate familiarity in the French language.

Monsieur Léon, in spite of the dash of gay humor which the speech I have quoted indicates, was a serious-minded young Frenchman, neither the *beau sabreur* nor the "pleasure hound" of the boulevards which for so long we ingenuously imagined all young Parisians to be. This was before the war, of course, and the war has taught us something of the nation's courage and consecration, and yet it may be doubted whether even now we understand much about the combination of student and man of action which was Léon Gasquier.

He had studied hard for this civil service in the colonies. He had an alert, serious, and highly trained mind, and a considerable lore of strange facts about Morocco. He had imagination and sensitiveness, he felt the beauty about him here in his remote post, some of its poetry too; but he was a hard logical modern thinker. And he was furthermore, almost as a matter of course, a *libre-penseur*, a freethinker in religious matters. He intended, in his official capacity, to pay due respect to the prejudices—he called them that—of both the Christians and Mohammedans between whom in a manner he stood.

"I am so religious a man," he said ironically, "that I believe one creed as likely or as unlikely to be true as another."

For this at least neutrality of mind it is probable that the locally pious thanked him. He had to do with the administration of the mosques and the zaouias, or monasteries. And his duties extended even to some supervision over the wandering Marabouts or desert saints who occasionally come up the green foothills to Tlemcar. In his treatment of these holy ones he showed justice, but little sympathy, and perhaps not so much imagination as I could have wished. He was indeed in all religious matters very cocksure.

I had some little knowledge, which I shared with Monsieur Léon, of the neighboring far holier city of Bar-el-Azrah. And I sometimes tried, half jocosely perhaps because of his freethinking, to impress upon him that sainthood in the Mohammedan world still flourishes. To me the white-robed figures who stalked through the bazaar and across the market place looked indeed as if they might be prophets from the Old Testament, or saints from the New. And by night, especially if the moon silvered the white town, I own I might perhaps have believed in saints and miracles. But I had not the intellectual integrity of my young friend.

This much of saints and miracles and of Monsieur Léon's attitude as regards them must be said now in order that the situation may be appreciated which arose with the unexpected arrival in Tlemcar of Léon's uncle, Henri Beaujoly of Blois on the Loire, bringing with him his daughter Mademoiselle Lucie.

Monsieur Beaujoly transformed the Hôtel de Paris at once. Fat and jovial, like a true Tourangeau, he loved good cheer and meant to be well nourished. He made friends with Edouard at once, inside of an hour he was in the chef's kitchen consulting and advising with him. And, established after lunch in the little café and later on the terrace in front of it, he called successively for coffee and liqueurs and beer and apéritifs. He did in time betray, it is true, a curiosity concerning indigenous dancing girls, but on the whole he manifested no special desire to explore Tlemcar, though he watched the exotic pageant of the town's daily life stream by with a shrewd philosophic eye.

That first day Mademoiselle Lucie retired to her room after lunch and Monsieur Léon went about his business. I was an idler, and Monsieur Beaujoly seized upon me. A conversation concerned with the merits of the cuisines respectively with butter or with fat put us in complete rapport, and it was really no time at all before I knew what had brought him, or more precisely what had induced him to bring his Lucie out, to see young Monsieur Léon.

"As you see me," said Monsieur Beaujoly expansively, putting orange flower water in his coffee in the native fashion, "I am a widower! Well enough preserved, you will admit. Not young perhaps, but of a temperament still adapted marvelously to life. I ask myself, naturally—shall I remarry myself? But I am also a man of heart, of a certain devotion to duty. I am a father. I do not wish to give my child a step-mother (I had one when I was small—and no!). Yet if I do not marry, my life does not stop, does it? Am

I asked to deprive myself of all my natural pleasures as once again a celibate, because I have a young daughter, virtuous and *comme il faut*? I do not know whether you plumb my meaning, sir—”

I assured him that I did, to its depth.

“You mean,” I suggested, “that a suitable marriage for Mademoiselle Beaujoly would render her happier, and also render her father happier—and measurably freer.”

“Monsieur is of an exactness of intelligence.”

“But then—” I began. “Your daughter is young, she is extremely pretty, she will doubtless have a *dot*. Why then—?”

“My daughter has all the qualities men should seek in wives. Except one. She does not wish to marry. She wishes instead to enter a convent. There are three admirable young men, *partis* excessively eligible, at our own little city of Blois. They say nothing to her.”

“But in France, marriages, so I’ve understood—”

“In France,” he retorted quickly, “parents of the twentieth century do not force their daughters to the altar. Did I not tell you I had a father’s heart? But I must make myself clear as to religious piety. It is the ornament of France. And the convent is an exquisite refuge for certain women. Yet I cannot bear it that a daughter of mine—and I have every reason before God to suppose she is—should have no wish for what is gay and good and pleasant and wholesome in life. And too I wish one day to go of a morning with my grandchildren fishing in our Loire and to bring home the materials for a good *friture*. You

know our fried fish of Touraine, monsieur? Oh, *la bonne friture! Qu'elle est bonne!*"

There was a slight digression, on the proper cooking of river fish, but we were soon back to the original question.

"You hoped, I gather," I ventured over a glass of *fine de champagne*, "to distract the mind of mademoiselle by this trip to Morocco."

"Morocco?" he asked oddly as if he quite forgot in what strange remote corner of the world we sat. "Monsieur," he went on, "I will be open with you. You are Léon's friend. He spoke of you in the highest and most gratifying terms. I will unbosom myself. There is no one here but you in whom I could confide. I am of a certain expansiveness—as I am sure to tell you everything later I may as well tell you now."

By mutual agreement we ventured upon another glass, and he told me why it was that he had hoped that this trip to Tlemcar would make his daughter forget the convent and its eternal virginal seclusion.

It was nine years earlier, when Léon was a scant twenty and Lucie just turned sixteen, that the boy had come for the summer to his uncle and aunt's at Blois. The blue Loire rippled over its lovely shallows, the old town lying between the château and the river slept on its leafy bank, the roses bloomed in Madame Beaujoly's garden and the two children ever so gently and timidly thought they were in love. It is the traditional, almost the inevitable thing in France that one's first love should be one's cousin. Monsieur Beaujoly was under no delusion about Léon,

indeed he would have thought the worse of him had not many later loves diversified his life. But he somehow suspected that the slender, pale, lovely Lucie had never quite forgotten.

"I love my child," he said quietly, "but no father is a mother, and I have not her confidence as would my Hortense have had, had she lived. But I have done what I could. Léon, at any rate, is not married. We shall see. If not this, then I shall perhaps resign myself to the convent, or rather resign my daughter to one."

The next day or two I observed Lucie. She was of the restraint of manner which distinguishes the young Frenchwoman who has been brought up in the old-fashioned way. She had her little bursts of gayety, but somehow one seemed even then to hear the novices' laughter as they played in the convent garden. She was very lovely to look at in a chiseled cameo kind of way, and her character, I was sure, had something of this exquisite quality. I believed that she loved Léon, and that for all her fragile, pale beauty she might love with deep feeling. But I felt at the same time that in her was the stuff of martyrs, and that Léon's free-thinking might make her feel that the more she cared for him the more the convent was her only salvation.

As to Monsieur Léon, it was evident enough that Lucie's cool, temperate beauty was welcome to a man who had been for almost a year away from any women of his own class, in a hot little Moorish city not far from the desert. Father Beaujoly was enthusiastic and hopeful and Sunday night at dinner stood us a bottle of very nasty sweet champagne. I was less

sanguine. We left the young people alone when we could contrive it. I even managed to persuade Monsieur Beaujoly that an evening visit with me to the Café Maure, where the Ouled Nâils were dancing, was almost his duty as a good but sly father. Certainly no managing pair of mothers could have done better than we did; I had begun to take a kind of maternal-paternal matchmaking attitude toward my young friend. Léon and Lucie had enough opportunity to talk. But I should have been glad to know what they talked about.

It was, curiously enough, the Orient about us which finally let me into the secrets of my pair of occidental lovers, if they could be called that. I was in the habit of lounging down after lunch and a short siesta to the Petite Residence, as we called Monsieur Léon's small house where he had his office, to watch him do his business, or to stroll with him round the city as he cast a general supervising eye. Whatever legally in Paris he may have been, in Tlemcar he was a combination of judge, prosecuting attorney, and counsel for the defense, a kind of little father to all the native population.

To cling to this last figure of speech, an ancient and venerable man named Abdullah was destined, in spite of his eighty-odd years and his incredible white beard, to become young. Monsieur Léon's newest child and the most troublesome of his family. Abdullah was by profession a saint, nothing less. And his only wish was to be allowed to sleep at night under the arches of the market place and by day to sit on the ground by the Mogador Gate, in the sun in winter and in the

shade in summer, with a wooden bowl in front of him in which the pious might place the little food offerings which should sustain him. He was very like a beggar, since all he did or planned to do was to sit quietly and ask alms for the love of Allah. But the world over, since time began, begging and holiness, two great and honorable professions, have been inextricably allied. Most of all in Mohammedan lands is it difficult to define the condition of sainthood.

Abdullah would perhaps have been learned in the Koran, but he could not read. He was presumably meditating upon holy things until his thoughts were like a sweet perfume about him and in the nostrils of the people, and indeed in his mild brown old face a look of much goodness and of innocence of the world abode. You felt as if perhaps in his far youth he might have watched flocks in some remote green upland pasture of the Atlas Mountains and there seen visions to tell of which he had descended to the cities of the plain and grown old there, witnessing their continued wickedness, and yet never quite discouraged as to the coming of a great holiness upon them by the will of Allah and his Prophet.

So admirable and so ancient a saint would have been long since traditional and revered in Tlemcar, you might have supposed. The extraordinary thing was that he had come there that very day. From the road that led to the holy city of Bar-el-Azrah he had appeared. Long had he lived under the very shadow of the tomb of the Great Saint at Azrah, so he announced, but now he was to abide in Tlemcar. And without further ado he squatted by the Mogador Gate

and drew forth his beggar's bowl and set it on the ground in front of him.

But life is not, even in Tlemcar, quite so simple as all that. The Mogador Gate had already three long-established beggars, very dirty and doubtless very holy, who promptly beat the ancient Abdullah with staves and drove him incontinently from his chosen place. The turmoil which this episode was still causing in the market place when Monsieur Léon and I arrived there about four was, to me at least, very pleasant. Especially as it was explained to me by Hassan, Léon's interpreter and dragoman, than whom a more gifted and agreeable rogue is rarely to be encountered even in North Africa, where such thrive.

News, I had long ago learned, runs like quicksilver in a north African town. Hassan, even before the row began, had, it appeared, heard of Abdullah's arrival and had his own explanation of his emigration to our less holy city from the more revered Azrah. In Hassan piety and cynicism were blended in a very happy way.

"I have seen this one at Bar-el-Azrah," said he, "and know him for a well-reputed and esteemed man of holiness. May he long be preserved by Allah! But in the holy city there are many who sit in the odor of sanctity with their bowls before them, and the bowls are not all filled. The piety of the inhabitants of Azrah is unquestioned, but the exercises of religion leave them not much time for the occupations which produce wealth. They are but human, they eat first themselves and sometimes there remains little for the bowls of saints."

"Tlemcar and the full bowl," I murmured. Hassan nodded.

"Since the plan was projected that Tlemcar should end a spur of the new railway, and the city, in anticipation of the coming prosperity, began to waken, I have anticipated," Hassan went on, "that it would become more adapted to the residence of these holy ones. I foresaw the gradual diminution of the sanctity of Azrah. This Abdullah, though very old, moves with the times. He is the first one here."

"Why does he say he came?" asked Monsieur Léon. And Hassan put the question.

The answer I had just enough Arabic half to understand before Hassan translated it.

"He came, he says," explained the dragoman, "because there is some one here who needs him."

A veiled look came over the old Abdullah's eyes. You might have thought him blind. He sat staring apparently at Léon, but he looked through and beyond him, searching, you might have said, for the unknown to whom he was to bring aid.

"Some one who needs him?" said Léon lightly. "That some one is most evidently not at the Mogador Gate."

We took him with us up to the little Mosque of the Companion of the Prophet. Hassan thought there might be pickings there. But a one-legged hunchback with a gift for vituperation howled and complained so wildly that we turned away.

"I cannot leave him to this misshapen demon. Tell him to go back to Bar-el-Azrah," cried the resident. And we went about our business, leaving the ancient

of days gazing in mild surprise at the gesticulating, screaming, humped beggar and then slowly shuffling on after us toward the lower town.

Late in the afternoon we came back to the "Petite Residence." In the courtyard sat Abdullah meditatively.

"What is he doing here?"

"He awaits your pleasure," interpreted Hassan, smiling ironically. He may have had more experience than had Monsieur Léon of the persistency of saints.

Léon paused in amused exasperation.

"Has he never done anything at Bar-el-Azrah but beg—oh, yes, and be a saint, of course?"

"Nothing," replied Hassan, "save that he says some few times he has performed some small miracles."

"Miracles!" repeated the resident, with a sudden surprising bitterness. "Tell him with my compliments that there are no such things as miracles!"

As we started toward the hotel and dinner Léon brooded somberly. I stopped a moment (and made him) to watch the setting sun color a long white street and flame upon a little minaret set with blue tiles like turquoise.

"Miracles indeed," he said, half to himself. "In these my little cousin too insists that I shall declare my belief."

I lingered an instant. I would have delayed dinner to receive his confidence, though I knew from Monsieur Beaujoly that we were that evening to eat Edouard's triumph, the *poulet poché à la Montesquiou*. But he said no more, and we strode on silently in the gathering dusk to dinner. In the lively company of

Lucie's father I forgot that there were ever in question any miracles beyond those wrought by good chefs and the distillers of fine liqueurs.

Monsieur Beaujoly and I, as may be guessed from this confession of my postprandial state of mind, had established ourselves at a tin table on the terrace. At about eight-thirty three magnificent Jewesses in tight-fitting yellow leather breeches went by, which was enough to make my companion rock with satisfied mirth and declare that such a sight alone repaid him for the long journey from Blois to Tlemcar. Yet later, as the town and the café grew a little quieter, I ventured to ask whether the long journey was otherwise likely to be repaid as he had hoped.

Mademoiselle Lucie and Monsieur Léon had gone into the little hotel garden, which was mostly hard-packed earth, behind the café. There, we knew, was a bench under a struggling pomegranate bush, and upon it we knew the cousins sat. I may say here that I had come to join in the wish that had made her father bring Lucie out, that she might marry Léon. I had seen little enough of the girl. I can pretend to give even now no clear portrait of her. But she was exquisite, that I knew, though I had been permitted only to see the faint, lovely profile of her, like the calm portrait of some virgin Christian saint against the turbulent background of this Eastern city.

"Have you," I asked, "reason to feel encouragement of your hopes?"

He sighed.

"Almost none, I fear. It was, I presume, natural, considering their frames of mind that before their

minds could turn wholly to love they should discuss religion. I will not pretend to be wholly open with you as to what my daughter may have confided in me. I respect her delicacy of a young girl, and whatever I may in my unworthy way think of the mysteries of religion, I can see the beauty of her belief in them. I believe, monsieur, that the children love each other as once in our little Blois upon the Loire. But I think my little Lucie will go back to France to her convent. And Léon will perhaps, who knows, set up a harem here. And all because he cannot and will not believe—"

"In miracles?" I suggested, remembering Léon's bitter comments upon Abdullah's miracles.

He looked at me a moment in surprise.

"I believe the discussion has caught, as it were, upon that point. As if," he added softly, "there could be any greater miracle than that some day I should take my grandchildren fishing on the Loire for *goujons* for *la bonne friture*."

We sat in silence, and suddenly Lucie came to wish her father good night. She looked as if she had been crying, but not as if she had yielded a single minor theological point. Léon, like a thundercloud, went by us into the dimly lit night. Monsieur Beaujoly sighed.

"It has the appearance of being the end," he said.

Soon after that he went quietly upstairs to bed. He was deeply disappointed, I could see.

I, left alone, went a short meditative stroll down the street to the "Residence." Occasional white figures stalked by me in the black night; somehow the

old Morocco, fanatical and unconquered yet beyond the confines of the towns, seemed proudly to ask why we of Europe and America should come to prattle of our affairs and our miracles near the edge of its great desert and in the holy places of its wild religion.

At Monsieur Léon's house I saw light stream across the courtyard wall, showing that he was in his room. Outside, on the threshold of the great barred gate, slept in peace Abdullah, like a gray old watchdog, faithful but useless.

The next day was a busy one. Monsieur Beaujoly was impatient to be off, and was hustling his daughter to be ready. And poor Lucie, for whom it can only have been torture to stay longer, was but too eager to go. It was not so much a morning of solemn sadness as of bad temper and fretfulness at small annoyances.

We were to have *déjeuner* early, at half past eleven, for the convenience of the travelers. A minute before that Monsieur Léon appeared, calm to exaggeration. In his wake hobbled the ancient Abdullah.

"He is a pest," remarked Léon, looking stern. "He disturbs me and the town. I am sending a courier to my confrère Fournier to-morrow. I shall send this reprobate saint along. Let him work his miracles at Bar-el-Azrah, not here."

At this moment Lucie came out upon the terrace. Léon greeted her with a precise formality. She saw Abdullah and asked who and what he was—she was only making conversation to carry her over an awkward *quart d'heure*, that was evident. But Monsieur

Léon saw his opportunity and took it with some bitterness.

"This one? He is a saint. You two should know each other." He bowed ironically. "He, like you, believes in miracles."

She straightened herself to take the blow. "It is well for the salvation of Tlemcar that there is some one who does believe."

"But not in Christian miracles, my dear cousin. In those of Mohammed and his saints."

"If it is a faith in false gods, it is still faith," she answered him. She was broader, perhaps deeper, than I had guessed. But he was still bitter.

"It is also a faith in himself," he pursued. "He himself performs miracles sometimes, so he tells me."

She looked at Abdullah and at Léon. And a sudden shy softness ran over her. She seemed again to appeal for help.

"Why should it not be, perhaps? Though I know nothing of miracles outside those of the Church. But there are the legends of saints who were ignorant and untaught and lived in strange far lands and yet through their simplicity God worked His wonders. If it should please God that this old man should be His servant, all might be possible even here and to-day. Léon, can you not see that?"

She had forgotten us, forgotten everything except her faith—and her first love. But Léon gave no response save somberly to shake his head.

It was Abdullah who, as if he had already worked the miracle of understanding her rapid French, seemed to answer. He came forward and knelt before this

strange woman, outrageously unveiled, and poured forth a stream of sonorous Arabic.

Hassan, who had come with them, listened with serious appreciation.

"He wishes you all the fine things of the world, mademoiselle. He will pray that evil spirits shall always keep far from you, that they may not be able to harm even so much as a flea in your bed."

Hassan smiled at this indelicacy of the holy one. But at Abdullah's next speech he shot an odd glance at Mademoiselle Beaujoly.

"He says too that he perceives that mademoiselle is also of those who in sanctity might well work miracles."

Lucie smiled—for the first time.

"Tell him he is wrong," she said. "I have tried to work one—and failed."

And with that we went in to lunch.

Directly after that meal—under Edouard's auspices an epicurean banquet—the carriage came to drive them to Zenbigh. The two Moorish soldiers detailed to Monsieur Léon's service were to escort them and pranced on their elaborately caparisoned steeds before the equipage. The chef, not content with his culinary compliment, presented Mademoiselle Lucie with a bouquet of white roses. And then Beaujoly and I, arm in arm, went to the terrace for a final *fine*, thus exercising for the last time, though we now knew it to be vain, our ancient cunning in leaving the young people together for a final word. What passed then I shall never know, but a white rose was in Léon's buttonhole as they drove away.

The white rose was there that night at dinner, after which Léon morosely left me with scant excuses of work to be done. Faded and limp it was there at lunch the next day and, already drying and yellowing, it was still in the lapel of his coat at dinner. Was it, turning to scented dust, a symbol of his hopes? He touched it for an instant lightly with the tips of his fingers as that second evening he sat down with me on the poor little café terrace, from which, with the departure of Monsieur Beaujoly, the gayety had gone.

I had thought perhaps he would talk to me of Lucie. (But did not the fading rose tell me enough?) Instead he talked of Abdullah.

"He has tried to beg at all three gates of the town and by the doors of the eight mosques. He is a mass of bruises and has two cuts on his head. There is a *syndicat* of saints and beggars here against him. He is a harmless old nonunion fool, but if they insist that he go back to Bar-el-Azrah, what can I do?"

"You have not yet found the some one here who needs him?"

"No, indeed," laughed Léon ironically, "though he still insists that that is why he came."

It appeared as Léon proceeded that the old one himself had an alternative plan to the return to Azrah. There was, a little outside the Mogador Gate, a small ruined mass of masonry with traces of a small dome. It had once, they said, been the tomb of a Marabout—a holy man. But it had been now almost immemorially neglected, a pile of crumbling brick covered with unspeakable filth—the first thing to be cleared away when the march of French improvements should be-

gin. Abdullah asked for this decaying tomb. The grave of a saint should be guarded by one humble and pious, he said. He asked the right to establish himself there where no one claimed a right.

"And what do you say?"

"I say," Monsieur Léon replied, leaning over the tin table toward me, and speaking with a sudden feverish eagerness—"I say it will be very well to set a saint to guard a saint. Only I must be sure it is a saint whom I set to guard the Marabout's tomb."

"How are you to know?" I asked.

"He talked of miracles he had done sometimes, didn't he?"

"Such little miracles I understood."

"Yet they were miracles, he claimed. He talked of them to her, did he not? She said they were possible, even this Abdullah's miracles, did she not? But I say there are no miracles, that there have never been. Because I cannot stultify myself, cannot drug my intelligence, cannot renounce my right as a man to think I have let her go away, have I not? Miracles! I want to hear no more of them. I have told Abdullah that he shall have the Marabout's tomb and all the protection of the French Republic if at ten to-morrow in my courtyard he will perform for me a miracle."

"And he?"

"He accepted, poor fool!" replied Léon, staring wide-eyed at me. "But it cannot be done."

I reached across and put my hand upon his arm. He was trembling with nervousness, as if he had a fever.

"It is a rash man, Léon, who dares say that any-

thing cannot be. And if there were a miracle—should you be so unhappy?"

"God knows I wish there might be one."

"You say 'God knows.'"

"It is a phrase to me," he answered. "No more." And then he pulled himself together and finished with a wonderful pellucid frankness and grave dignity that made me proud to be his friend.

"It is my total lack of faith that keeps us apart, and I love her, monsieur. I would like her for my wife. But I have no hope."

In silence I walked him home to his white Moorish house, and there by the gate we found the old Abdullah, peacefully asleep, with, oddly enough, the cynic Hassan standing gazing meditatively at him. Hassan in turn walked me back to the Hôtel de Paris through the silent street. I spoke to him of the coming morning's test of faith. He was still cynical in tone, yet the tone was not quite what I had expected.

"When I was quite young I myself thought of becoming a saint. But my worldly good sense prevailed, for I saw that the profession of holiness led to extreme squalor in this world, whatever it might lead to in the next. But this same argument makes me think well of such as make the sacrifice of all comfort. And as to their powers, may it not be that they have some compensation? Of all the things that Allah has to offer for man's delight, I should not choose the power to work some unimportant miracle. But if I did so choose, and gave up all else for it—then who is wise enough to know what might not happen?"

As I went toward the "Residence" the next morning

a little before ten my mood was, briefly described, to tell myself that I was a fool. For a half dozen times in the night, to my intense discomfort, I had waked and found myself thinking of the test, and wondering about Lucie Beaujoly and what she thought of us in Tlemcar. I learned later exactly where she was and what was doing at ten that morning. They had got so far as Oued-el-Wanzar, where there was a little house of the White Fathers, the missionary priests of the north African desert. And Lucie, though the horses were ready, and the two Moorish soldiers eager to be off, insisted on going into the bare deserted little church and praying there for a half hour. And when she came out, so Monsieur Beaujoly reports, her eyes shone and a faint pink for the first time in days showed in her cheeks. I have often thought of her kneeling in prayer there, just as Abdullah, at the same moment, knelt before Monsieur Léon in Tlemcar. If there ever was a miracle, I shall never know if it were Lucie's or Abdullah's.

There was no crowd in the little courtyard. Only Léon and I, Hassan, two extra Moorish soldiers, and a cripple and a blind man, opponents of Abdullah from the Mogador Gate, whom a sense of justice had made Léon have fetched. There was, oddly enough, Père Bonivet, one of the White Fathers at whose church Lucie in Oued-el-Wanzar was, though we knew it not, on her knees in prayer. He was come from there and was on his way toward Timbuktu. He is a witness.

At ten o'clock Léon had the gate closed, and I think he laughed. Indeed, the whole thing suddenly became preposterous, medieval; Abdullah looked only like a

preposterous blithering old fool and scalawag. The sun was too bright, the white wall against which a purple bougainvillea climbed in splendor too material, too real a background. The venerable protagonist of the event looked weary and confused. He plucked Hassan by the sleeve and fretfully asked him some question.

"He asks," translated Hassan, "for the demoiselle he saw yesterday. If she is here, all will be well."

We told him she was not there—but was she not, perhaps?

He grew more confused for a moment and then, after a long stare through and beyond us, sat down on the flagged pavement as if resigned to play out the farce. In front of him he placed his beggar's bowl, and Hassan fetched him water, which he poured carefully in until it brimmed the edge, a little dike of its own crystal lifting it even above the earthen vessel's lip. The sun fell on it, and the purple flowers' reflection tinged it with lights like wine. It was in itself a pretty miracle, and I told myself quite all I expected. A breath would have spilled it.

"He asks your excellency," began Hassan to Monsieur Gasquier, "if it will suffice that he shall place something more in this already overflowing bowl, and that no drop of this most excellent water from your excellency's well shall brim over and dampen your courtyard pavement."

A faint breeze from the desert wandered in. It rippled the bowl's crystal and almost made it overflow. Monsieur Léon smiled. "Yes, if he adds something else safely, that will be enough."

And then Abdullah, without a word, stretched out his hand to the resident. Léon looked at him, and the smile slowly faded. The wind suddenly seemed a little cold. The thin brown arm, from which the ivory white burnoose fell back, still asked something. Léon went one step toward him, and then, as if he scarcely knew why he did it, took from his buttonhole the dead rose that had been there ever since Lucie went away, a rose that, like his hopes of happiness, had withered and drooped—a rose that had once been white like her, but was now yellow and brown like the desert of his future. He handed the remnant of a flower to the poor fool Abdullah, who believed in miracles like the poor fool Lucie, who had thought to work a miracle in the heart of the man who loved her.

The old creature, himself more withered than the rose, took the flower and slowly touched with its stem the crystal in his bowl. He smiled, indifferently almost. But Léon, as I suddenly looked at him, gazed with a concentration that was either fury or prayer upon the rose.

What I saw I do not know. What I thought I saw I know. I have been in India and seen a mere juggler in the market place do wonders. And yet nothing in my life has seemed quite like this happening in Tlemcar.

Again the little wind rippled the water's surface, again the purple bougainvillea seemed to redden it like wine in some sacrificial cup. And Lucie's rose slowly drank in refreshment with the water, drew life again from the humble beggar's bowl. Slowly the crystal rim lowered, slowly Abdullah plunged the stem deeper

in. And now the yellow and brown petals under my eyes seemed to whiten. Light seemed to flow back into them, till before my dazzled sight a white rose like a blazing star seemed all I could see in the white courtyard. A green leaf stiffened upon the once lifeless stem, and at last upon the magic mirror of the bowl's water floated a rosebud that was now a full-blown rose, a many-petaled rose that had been dead but now lived and poured forth such sweetness as seemed to fill the whole courtyard as would a whole scented bush of them have done. And not one drop of that most excellent water from Léon Gasquier's well did brim over nor dampen his courtyard pavement. Suddenly the blind beggar, who is no witness at all, according to the rules I know, gave a great cry and came forward. On the ground before Abdullah he beat his head and begged of him, so they told me afterward, that he would honor them of the Mogador Gate by ending his days with them.

My young friend turned to me. His eyes were bright with tears. He smiled at me.

"Do you too see?" he asked.

"I think I see," I answered, very simply.

"Then will you start with me for Tangier to-night and help me tell her that we have seen a miracle?"

He dropped on one knee before Abdullah and his bowl. I think, though of this I am not certain, that as he bent over he furtively made the sign of the cross. The older man gently lifted the white rose from the little lake of tinted water on which it lay and gave it back to the younger.

Léon put it in his buttonhole. As we started a few

hours later, I saw and he saw that it was again dry and faded, yellow and brown like the desert. Yet somehow we both believed that it had been once again white.

Monsieur Beaujoly does go fishing in the Loire with his grandchildren. *Oh, oh, la bonne friture!* And by a half-ruined Marabout's tomb by the Mogador Gate is still, they tell me, an ancient man called Abdullah begging with a bowl, a saint who once, they say, performed miracles at Tlemcar.

Fair Daughter of a Fairer Mother

FAIR DAUGHTER OF A FAIRER MOTHER

THE old graveyard at Tomocala is neglected now. The road beyond it dies away into a sandy trail across the flat woods. There is to-day a new, almost garish cemetery on higher, dryer ground, with ugly concrete work and a few hideous memorials. John Branster, who had a little farm and orange-grove lying next the older ground, and did the little stone-cutting that was needed for the occasional grave-stones of those early days, is dead and almost forgotten to-day in Tomocala. The story there is to tell here is some of it dim, ancient history on the Floridian east coast now, ancient history in New York too, where there may perhaps be a few very old men in the clubs who remember that when they were twenty and gay blades they sent bouquets to the stage door of Niblo's for Hortense Stevens.

The old graveyard is overgrown with green; a few wild orange-trees fill it with heavy perfume when spring comes, and through the summer red hibiscus flowers gleam here and there in the tangled leafy hedge that hides it from the lonely Creek Road. In New York the Garden that was Niblo's has gone forever; the memory of its lights, its music, and its proud beauties lives only in hearts for the most part as lonely now

as the road at Tomocala, which wanders away as if in discouragement into the solitude of the pines.

Few people either in Tomocala or in New York to-day know or remember that the beautiful Hortense Stevens, the darling of London and Paris and of our great town as well, lies in this obscure green corner where the mocking-birds by day and the whippoorwills by night are the only watchers by her grave. There is a little low headstone which John Branster cut from the gray shell rock. It had never more than just the letters H. S. upon it. These are now half obliterated in the soft stone, which too has grown green and mossy. Since John Branster died wild seeds and wild flowers have overrun the lot where she lies. The gardenias and camellias that he planted have died for lack of care or been throttled by the invading plants that in Florida so quickly obliterate the work of man.

Both these flowers she used to wear; in wreaths upon her golden hair and bouquets upon her lovely breast they used to die nightly in the heat of the theater's gas-light. And Louis Latour, in that hurried interview when he put John Branster in charge of that newly made grave, told him they were the kinds she had most loved.

It was in the days when beautiful and notorious ladies were famous for the flowers they wore—did not the younger Dumas's heroine, too, choose camellias to be known by?

As to Hortense Stevens it is needless to insist that she was beautiful, and useless to deny that she was notorious. All one can say in defense of her is that

it was a smallish, well-conducted world, the New York of those days, and that so lovely, and alas! so frail a creature attracted more attention in that decorous America than she might now.

An old print of her hangs in the entrance-lobby of one of those New York chophouses, once so famous, which cover their walls with portraits of theatrical celebrities, who, so the public is asked to believe, habitually ate their steaks and their grilled kidneys and their Welsh rarebits there.

The fair Stevens, as they said in those days, ate, we may be sure, in her own parlor at the hotel, with roses and smilax on the table, and French champagne in silver buckets on the black walnut sideboard, in the manner of a princess rather than of any chop-eating Bohemian. Yet the lovely picture, yellow now with time, can give an imaginative man who steps inside from the clanging of this new Broadway a romantic moment upon the older street.

Her hair is softly waved, and there are ringlets and a quaint pleasant rose—pink, you guess, behind her shell-like ear—let us not be ashamed to use the pretty faded language of the period. There is another portrait of her in water-colors to be seen, oddly enough perhaps, in the dignified and rarely visited hall of the Historical Society, showing her as *Helen the Fair* in Offenbach's immortal operetta. She half reclines on a Greek couch in a marble hall looking upon a violet sea, and faint diaphanous draperies of pale blue and lilac reveal more than they hide her lovely contours. Even the amateurish hand which in that queer barren inartistic desert of the mid-century sketched her thus,

managed to hint at a beauty of line which would have sent Flaxman to his knees before her. She was so fair, and so serene! Even now as she peers forth in the dimness of the Historical Society she seems so kind, yes, so good.

Yet she was, it must be repeated, notorious. The succession of her admirers bewildered and should have shocked New York. Yet does any one reproach Venus that of all the goddesses she was most dedicated to love? Stevens, in her blinding, kindly beauty, had something of this serene paganism. Was it perhaps that in some primeval sweet way, in some ultimate kind ingenuousness she felt herself only beauty's guardian, and lavished it almost unconsciously upon an eager, hungry world?

She was popular from the beginning—hers were the last horses ever taken from a prima donna's carriage so that the gallant mob of Manhattan might draw her from the stage door to the hotel, and it is likely that on that last scandalous flight with Latour she found infatuated creatures to be loyal to the last. Yet the public is a spoiled, capricious thing; it was from the beginning angry at the inconsiderate interruption of the run of "La Belle Hélène;" suddenly it became intensely moral.

Of course when the news crept back that she had died in an obscure Florida settlement only a few weeks after her disappearance from Broadway, the press did what it could to say the traditional *nil nisi bonum*. And Latour did not come back to raise again the flame of public indignation; he went on to Havana and

thence to Paris, where he lived the last ten years of his life.

However, that first summer Mrs. Latour's suit for divorce renewed the scandal, which had a little died down, and the name of the poor dead servant of the public was freshly besmirched. Feeling was again bitter, partly on account of the Latours' two children, whom he deserted together with their mother, but even more because of another child, a small golden-haired, blue-eyed girl, the daughter of Hortense and an earlier problematical, possibly mythical Stevens. This child was then in the country upon a Connecticut farm.

This will be, as we go on, her story, or of one little crucial episode in it, but we can for a while leave her playing in the meadows along the river. She never remembered much of that mother, not more than a vision of beauty bending rarely, but benignantly, over her. But she heard with shame as she grew older of the notoriety and the scandal of her mother's end. She believed even when she made her first success that for the inner world of the theater she was, after all, forever the daughter of the great Stevens, and that not much was expected of her in the way of morals.

This is the story of John Branster of Tomocala, too, and of his meeting, years later, with Linda Stevens. But we must go back to the Florida of her mother's days.

It was before the railroad came. You went up the St. Johns by steamer to Palatka, and then as best you could by horse or mule drawn conveyance to the

coast. It was hunting and fishing country; it was visited by sportsmen, and the old Palmetto House, which is still standing at Tomocala with a half-tumbled-down gallery along the river front, received the fugitives with some degree of style and comfort.

Louis Latour, who was the son of one of the old French residents of New York, would be, to our taste of to-day, perhaps, too handsome a fellow, too large-eyed, too silky-mustached, too full-blooded and even too carefully dressed for a figure of romance. But he was what ladies in those days loved, and who may dispute their taste? It is probable that he had been to Tomocala before, and judged it both remote and lovely enough for his present purposes.

The season of operettas at the old Garden had been in full swing in March when the Stevens ended it by her flight. In Tomocala spring was in full tumultuous onrush. There were climbing tea-roses shedding heavy odors, and a strange exotic vine that clambered on the hotel gallery and broke out into huge globular masses of mauve blossoms like a giant wandering lilac. Magnolias flowered, and with the full moon mocking-birds sang all night. It was indeed a place to count the world well lost.

Helen of Troy wandering so far afield attracted attention. John Branster saw her once, stepping from a catboat. But he lived a solitary life and heard little or nothing of village gossip. Indeed there was not much gossip. One so beautiful had never walked beneath our orange-trees, no one had ever worn such white broadcloth pelerines, nor ever been seen with such strings of pearls. But she had come as Mrs.

Latour, and it took some time for New York's scandal and its newspapers to reach the lonely reaches of the Indian River. And by then the fever had caught her, and the idyl was over. Latour was indeed frantic with grief, but desperate, too, to get away.

After she was buried in the cemetery in the woods out the Creek Road, and her simple gravestone had been ordered from John Branster, Louis Latour had a few last words with him.

"I sha'n't ever be back here," he said, "but I'd like to make some arrangements about—about her grave."

They stood at the door of Branster's cabin, and looked across his fence to the low white mound of sandy soil which marked where she lay.

"I want to think that it will be kept green, if any one can ever make it green. Are you going to go on living here by the cemetery?"

"Don't know any reason why I should leave," drawled Branster, "until I leave for the promised land, and I ain't in no ways in a hurry about that."

"Then will you take charge of it?"

Latour thrust a crumpled ball of bills into John Branster's hand. Branster slowly unfolded the bills. It was a hundred dollars, a fortune for Tomocala and those days.

"I'll send you something every year," said Latour, "wherever I am. And you make it look—as if somebody remembered."

"I'm liable to remember, myself," said Branster, smiling slowly, and turning over the money in his hands, "if this happens regular."

"It will," came from the other, almost passionately.

And then he went on, with an air of excitement which John Branster explained, and excused, by thinking that he was French: "And I want you to understand, whatever happens and whatever any one says, that she was—good. Good—and oh! beautiful!" he added, half to himself.

"I saw her once," said John Branster. "She certainly were beautiful. And good, I reckon."

He had not heard that she was bad, and so he paid no great attention to this odd New York gentleman's protests. Of course she was good; just how good was left for his imagination, working through the long lonely years after Louis Latour had gone, to realize.

The threads of our story are many, and their tangle lies across many years. But for a while we may linger in the country back of Tomocala and watch the springs come and go. For ten years there came to John Branster in April money from Paris. Then, with no word, it stopped, when Louis Latour died. But by this time the grave in the old cemetery had become as much John Branster's as Latour's. It is this which must be explained, though it will be difficult to make clear.

In a square around the grave there grew a thick hedge of hibiscus, red and pink. And within Branster set roses and camellias, because he had been told she liked them, and other flowering shrubs. He had always been a lonely man; the passing years made him almost a hermit. Yet is it possible that he came to feel himself not quite alone? There is mystery in deep woods and magic in such flowering shrubs if one lives long with them. They shed with their perfume some strange balm, some estranging influence from the

world. Remoteness and unreality hang in the air of any garden that is for a long time hidden from all but the gardener. And so in Tomocala, as the years deepened and gray touched John Branster's temples, he grew to feel better acquainted with the woman who had been left sleeping there in his charge.

He had seen her but once. He did not know it, but this had often, in that glittering past, been enough for a man to fall in love with her. Perhaps he fell in love with her. But he never put it to himself that way. It was just that the thought of her made him less lonely in a world for him naturally lonely. And if she was with God, as people said of the dead, then to think of her would be the nearest to God he could ever come.

Perhaps this is to explain this mysticism too much. He himself could never have put it this way. He only knew that she had been beautiful, and oh, good! And that he only was left to remember her, and to train the yellow *Perle des Jardins* roses which made a tangle at her head.

As Louis Latour was going away, those years ago, Branster had said to him:

"You're never coming back, you say. Will there be anybody else?"

"Oh, there's a daughter of hers," answered Latour almost carelessly. "She might come one day."

Nothing more had been said, nor asked. Neither Tomocala nor John Branster knew anything of Linda Stevens. And yet one day, eighteen years later, she came.

Hortense had been the creature of the serene, sunny,

spacious days of the mid-century. Linda was of its feverish end. She, too, was all pink and gold, with eyes that were forget-me-not blue. But she was no goddess, but a sprite, complicated with doubts, torn with swift loves and quick hates, a thing of charm, of talents, of laughter and tears following each other. She was reckless, but, so they said, "good." (Her mother, oh, lovely kind Venus of an older, simpler world, had not been reckless, but also had been more rarely "good.")

Linda, for whom there had been an unexplained trust fund, and some kind of guardianship vested in an old-fashioned firm of lawyers, was sent to a convent school up the Hudson, from which at the age of eighteen she ran away to go on the stage. Messrs. Richards and Bleeckman had, after one stormy interview, acquiesced in her career, merely paying her debts occasionally when the debts were small enough to make that possible.

For the memory of what she was as an actress one must go to those who were young in the early nineties of the last century, just when Minnie Maddern was temporarily retiring from the stage and Maude Adams was just beginning upon it. Flighty, frothing, irresponsible creature she was, with quick turns to tenderness, and lyric moments when the dullest modern prose grew into poetry as she spoke it.

She had no poise, but a swift satiric modern intelligence, a dry biting humor set among fine-spun fantasies. She was made to be the idol of a time that was nervous and racked, morbid and perhaps degenerate, with some sense of the volcanic changes that a

few decades were to bring to the world. She was meant for happiness, yet for suffering as well. Meant for love too, perhaps, a sacrifice to it as had been the fair and already fabled Stevens of an earlier day. But if this were so, she seemed determined to dodge destiny, to play with fire, and not be burnt, to show the world that Hortense Stevens's daughter could cut a new trail through the world, not follow in the one to which so many were ready to force her.

She allowed no one to speak of Hortense, except as one alluded to a distinguished historic figure. Yet she herself could be bitter on the topic. Indeed, it was one of the forms of her bravado to ask why she, Linda, should run straight since she came of different and more brilliant tradition. But though she was outrageous often, she did run straight. Yet she came to Tomocala one April as Hortense had come in April; and with her was Tom Burr Halton. Those who knew her best were least certain whether she was still running straight or not. Appearances were against her, but even in the last century's nineties the world had grown too modern for it to be at all safe to trust appearances.

All Tomocala knew was that they both, Stevens and Tommy Halton, arrived by the late afternoon train—the railroad had come to Tomocala by now—and went to the same hotel, though in as discreetly remote apartments as if they had been strangers. They dined together, however, the meal and its service increasing Halton's amazement at Linda's choice of Tomocala and the ancient Palmetto House as the goal of their flight from New York. Tom was a simple soul, sim-

pler even than the handsome Louis Latour of the earlier escapade, and Linda a thousand times more difficult of comprehension than the goddess Hortense.

After dinner—supper they called it at the Palmetto House—they went out upon the road along the river. There was a moon in the first quarter as there had been eighteen years ago, and the broad sheet of the Indian River shimmered in it unchanged; the same slim palmettoes showed black against the southern sky. From the village groves in flower a flood of sweetness of the orange-blossoms came down to the shore with the faint land breeze. A mockingbird sang a song to the young moon. For a short distance the loveliness of the soft night, its contrast with the raw March they had left, held them both silent. Finally the girl spoke:

"I expect you're wondering, Tom, why I chose this queer place to come to."

"I'm not asking you any questions, Linda," he answered, almost grimly.

"That's why you hope to get some answers, I suppose," she said, looking at him askance, and laughing a little, mischievously.

"Yes," he said, plainly a little stirred. "You know where I stand. I want you."

"And you've left your wife and children as a kind of guarantee of good faith. You know, Tom, it's that wife and children of yours that bother me. We're playing them a rather dirty trick. Still, we've come down here, and here we are, Tom. Do you like it?"

"Oh, the place is all right if—if you're all right."

"If I'm all wrong, you mean," she answered quickly.

"Why will you put it that way, Linda? Don't you love me?"

"I think I do, Tom. Really I hope I do. I should think a woman could love any man a night like this."

"Any man!" he repeated angrily. And he caught her roughly. "Kiss me," he commanded.

"Surely I will. Where's the harm in kissing?"

They were by Collins's, and his grove was in full flower. The night was almost too heavy with sweetness. Slowly she disengaged herself from his arms.

"I guess I love you, Tom Halton. You are a handsome brute, you are, and I'm a fool. How much of a fool am I? That's what we came down here to find out. I'll tell you about Tomocala. My mother ran away too, with a man who loved her. They came here. I wanted to come, too. I wanted to see whether here the magic would work on me and I'd count the world well lost—that's what they say, isn't it?—for you. Of course she had the advantage of me; she'd no morals—"

"Linda!" protested the man.

"Why shouldn't I say so! You know that, although I'm Linda Stevens, I'm Hortense's daughter. That's why all you men in New York think you've a chance with me."

"My God," muttered Halton, "haven't I behaved myself? Haven't you held me a mile off? And don't I want to marry you as soon as she gets her divorce?"

"Why the devil should I want to marry you? If I find out that I'm bad, I want to be beautifully, recklessly bad, my child."

"All right," said he, in a low voice, "come on."

"But perhaps I'm not bad after all."

She laughed with that absurd and unexpected merriment of hers, and then, just as unexpectedly, she suddenly lifted herself on tiptoe and gave his cheek a bird-like peck, as different from the kiss of a minute earlier as could be. There were so many Lindas, you see. She began gayly to talk of the sailing and fishing they would try to-morrow—it was like a child who had run away from school—and to laugh about the dilemma at the Jefferson Theater where the run of "Hearts and Faces" had, so it would probably be announced, been interrupted by the illness of Miss Linda Stevens.

"They were playing 'La Belle Hélène' when she came here," meditated Hortense's daughter. "I wish she hadn't died before I knew her—I was only five, you see. I wish I'd seen her act. Of course she sang, but as a matter of fact I'm a better actress, I'm sure. But she was lovely; so beautiful, my dear, so beautiful! She can't have cared much about me, I don't believe, or she wouldn't have gone away and left me the way she did. So I don't suppose she would care much about me now, not the way most mothers would."

The moon went behind a cloud, and the wind shifting lazily in the night brought a cooler air from the broad river. She caught his arm almost as if afraid of loneliness in the world.

"Why talk about her so much?" protested Halton, in a roughened voice. "She's ancient history."

"I talk about her," replied the girl, "because we've come here to see her grave."

He drew away from her at this and her hand slipped from his arm.

"No, that isn't why we've come here," he said. "We have come here because you belong to me and I belong to you, and we're going to take what's our own, and tell the whole world to go to the devil."

"Well," said Linda, still in a low voice, "her grave is a shrine of love—that kind. And I've a lot of her in me. Half the time I think it's wrong, what we're doing—you leaving your wife and your children, and I leaving my work and the theater and things I really care about. And there are times when I don't care a hang for any of them, and I thank God I'm her daughter and bad. That's a fine family feeling, Tommy, isn't it, but you profit by it."

"By God, Linda, don't you love me ever just like a simple human woman?"

"I don't know, Tommy. I love you sometimes because your hair grows the way it does on your forehead, and because your eyes are put in with a dirty finger, and because you very often hurt me when you put your arms around me. I'm all nerves most of the time and you make me forget them. You make me not care whether I can ever come to be a great actress or not. I stop worrying about it."

"Well, do stop worrying about it. It's too fine a night. Moon, you know, and sweet smells and—well, all that kind of thing. Linda, my darling," he began.

"To-morrow night will be a fine night too," she answered slowly, "and I'll have been to see her."

There had been a heavy dew the night before, under the cool light of the moon's first quarter, and for a few hours after dawn it still lay shining in the morning sunlight. Within the little green enclosure spring

had come in fullness. The hedge was starry with hibiscus flowers, red and pink. And for the eighteenth time the old-fashioned *Perle des Jardins* rose drooped with heavy yellow buds. There was a little row of scented purple violets around the low mound. On one side yellow and white honeysuckle fought as creepers will with a hibiscus, twisting round its branches and mixing fine heavy-scented sprays of flowers with the other's great lily-shaped red blooms. In one corner, under the branches of a dark cedar, many thin translucent stems rose from a bed of begonia roots, carrying a foot or two aloft delicate pink blossoms, which seemed like a tiny pink sunrise cloud that had floated down to rest in the cool green shade. The orange-trees in his little home garden nearby contributed their fragrant odors. John Branster, kneeling to find a small spike of buds set upon his new favorite among the roses, stayed in this posture for a little while.

He was not an articulate nor a self-conscious person. But the sun on him, the freshness of the stirring air, the sparkle of dew, the pulsing spring that was in the air and that drove all these green growing things around him to hurry to their blossoming, gave him a sense that life was precious and fragrant and good.

If his religion had turned to God, as religions mostly do, he would, as many another garden mystic, have felt the brush over his budding rosebush of angelic wings. As it was, he had only a vague feeling, as he had had so often, that he was not quite alone, that the fair beautiful creature who had come to sleep there so long ago still slept under the *Perle des Jardins*, and

was happy and kept him company. Then there was a little sound in front of him. He lifted his eyes and saw Linda.

She was nonchalant and smiling. It may be it was part bravado. She was too sensitive a creature not to feel, in spite of her cynicism, the implications of a daughter's first visit to such a spot as this cemetery. But after all she had come for her inheritance of evil, and she stood now demanding it of the past.

"Could you tell me—you seem to be the only person around here—" she began. She could not guess of course that this fair, well-kept enclosure was what she had imagined a neglected and forgotten grave.

"Hortense Stevens!" exclaimed John Branster, after she had asked her question, and he stared at her a moment. Then he said very quietly, almost as if it were an introduction, "Here she is."

"Here?" from Linda, with an odd catch in her breath. "In this lovely place?" She saw the hibiscus and the pink begonia cloud, and the faithful Pearl of Gardens drooping its yellow buds. She smelled the honeysuckle and the orange. And suddenly the Floridian magic which those who love the great peninsula know so well began to cast its spell upon her. The world she had left began to grow dim. A strange fancy came into her mind.

"Are you—are you Louis Latour?"

"That Frenchman!" John Branster too fled back through the years. "Oh, no."

Another, still wilder, imagining caught her. Suddenly a ghost from a dimmer, more uncertain past arose.

"You're not Stevens, are you? Not my—no, of course you're not," she finished, laughing nervously at her foolishness.

"I'm John Branster," he said. "Are you anything to her?"

"Not much," answered Linda lightly; "only her daughter."

"Oh! We've been waiting for you near eighteen years, her and I."

"You and she! Eighteen years! Have you taken care—of this, all that time? Why?"

"Well, at first I reckon it was because I was paid to do it—by him, you know. And then after he died—well, I reckon I was still paid to do it—in another way. You been powerful long time coming," he finished, almost sharply.

"She went away and left me when I was only five. She wasn't ever much of a mother to me."

"I don't reckon you ought to speak that way about her, child. She was meaning to come back to you, most likely, if she hadn't been took by the fever, sudden."

"*Was* she meaning to come back to me? Did she really care about me? Do you know? Did she tell you anything?"

The questions tumbled out. Even Linda, as it were, listened to them in surprise. Had she, all these years, been lonely because she had no memory of a mother's love? This was preposterous, she protested to herself, while tears—of vexation—came into her eyes. Yet she repeated her question:

"*Did* she tell you anything?"

"No," replied John Branster. "I never had speech with her. I only just saw her once. She was powerful good-looking."

"Yes, I know. Lovely."

"And good too. So good!" he went on, echoing Louis Latour's plea after all these years.

"Good! Was she good?" asked her daughter. "Who told you that?"

"Why, him—Latour."

"Would he know?" Linda was ironical.

"Wouldn't he? You mean because they'd only been married a week or so. Them's there," he explained hurriedly, "because that was her stage name."

"That's my name, too."

"I see. A first marriage. She was well known, wasn't she, in them theaters?"

"They loved her!" Linda remembered the old prints, the picture even in the chophouse entry.

"Something to have had such a mother," said John Branster.

"Something indeed," replied Linda, and she laughed. But for all that she came forward slowly and knelt by the low mound.

"You've kept it beautifully, wonderfully. I don't pretend I understand why you did. But I am grateful to you."

"Looked to me like she was the kind of a woman would like to have flowers all around. We used to have them gardenias and camellias for a while, but they never did very well. I was sorry, for he said she liked them."

"Yes, great bunches of them, thrown on the stage.

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And sometimes with diamond jewelry hidden in them." Linda's eyes shone. These were indeed the brave, romantic days of the theater. Then she suddenly turned almost angrily on John Branster. "But what do you imagine you can know of her or of her life?"

"I don't really know much," he admitted. "You see, it's this way—but I ain't no talker," he hesitated and stopped.

"Try to talk to me. Perhaps I need it," pleaded Linda.

"Well, I tended to things, and then he died, the Frenchman, in Paris. And I went on, like I said. And I reckon I just made up an idea of her. I didn't have much to go by."

"I suppose I didn't either," murmured the girl.

"And no one down here weren't likely to know much to tell me."

"And up there they knew so much to tell me." This was so low no one heard her, unless it was Hortense who slept.

"Somehow my idea grew, like the bushes. And some kind of a darned-fool way I got feeling that I *did* know her. Somehow it was nicer tending the flowers for some one you knew."

"And she seemed good?"

"Why, of course she seemed good. There weren't no other idea except goodness would go with what she looked—so beautiful."

"I wonder—perhaps she *was* good."

"Of course she was. Anyhow, you nor I ain't in no position to think otherwise. You're her daughter and I—"

"Well, what are you?"

"I? Well," he hesitated again. "If you wouldn't think it sounded too confounded foolish, I'd say I hope I'm a friend of hers."

"I don't think it sounds foolish at all," cried Linda. "I think you're the best friend she's ever had. I think for a long time you've been her only friend. I'd forgotten until—well, at present, we won't discuss what made me remember. But, well, I've imagination enough to like the idea of being her friend at last."

"That's good," said Branster, but without curiosity of any kind. He was accepting the daughter as unquestioningly as long ago he had accepted the mother. "This here Rambler's doing nice, ain't it?" He showed her the buds set.

"Yes," she said, but she did not look at the rose-bush. Her face looked puzzled and yet so eager, so young.

"Only—" she began slowly.

"Well—"

"Suppose some one should come along with the facts to prove that she hadn't been what you thought her, that she'd been—well, bad. Really bad."

"I wouldn't believe it. I don't know as I can explain to you, but—well, even if it was true that she was bad, I wouldn't believe it. You see, I've kind of got used to her being just as good as she was beautiful. I like her to be that way. She makes a better friend for me."

"She'd make a better mother for me, I suppose. No, I don't mean that," she went on, more quickly and with a darkening face. "I guess I want her to

have been bad. That let's me be bad too. Do you see?"

"*You* ain't bad," he laughed.

"You think not."

"With that hair and them blue eyes like your mother's. No. But, anyway," he went on, feeling his way slowly—he talked to so few people—"anyway, folks is different. She was more like a child, the way I size her up. She looked that way, and if she'd been bad, maybe she wouldn't have known the harm in it. But you're different."

"Why should I be any better than she was?" cried Linda impatiently.

"Because you got more brains."

"Have I?" she laughed. "Then I've got more than I want. I'm tired of thinking—my head cracks with it. I want just to feel and to be. I don't want to be responsible, or good either."

He looked at her face, which had grown pale and tormented looking, and finally he smiled.

"I don't just rightly see how you are going to avoid it. You *are* good. I reckon you inherited goodness from—from my friend."

From the road outside came the sound of whistling.

"Drink to me only with thine eyes—" it began—this was Tom Halton piping.

"Perhaps I *am* good," faltered Linda. "I'm sure sometimes I'm afraid so. But oh, I'm—I'm awfully lonely in the world."

John Branster was standing near the hibiscus hedge—he picked a pink blossom and slowly knelt and laid it on the ground between the rows of violets.

"I wish you could feel you wasn't quite so lonely."

"Do you think she loved me? Do you think she meant to come back to me?" she asked.

"There ain't a shadow of a doubt of it in my mind," he answered.

"If I believed that," said Linda, and her voice grew soft, "I wouldn't care at all whether she'd been good or bad. I'd believe she was good, the way you do."

John Branster stared at her, not understanding. She went on:

"And I'd do now whatever it would be that she'd want me to do."

Tom Halton now stood at the gap in the hibiscus hedge.

"Tom," she said, "this man saw my mother. He says she was beautiful and good. And because she was, for eighteen years he's made this place like this."

"Fine!" commented Halton, quite without suspicion. His hand tentatively went to his pocket—but Linda hurried on:

"I think, Tom," she said, with a queer wry smile, "that I'd like to think that some day some one will want to do that for me. I think that perhaps I want to be beautiful and good. And as I can't ever be as beautiful as she was, I'll have to be more good."

"Oh, confound you, Linda—" the man began, his cheerful face turning hard and ugly with anger. Then he stopped—something in her eyes, which were shining with tears, stopped him.

"Don't confound me, Tom Halton. You took your risks. And if you lose, you'll lose and take it standing up."

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An instant they looked straight into each other's eyes. She went on:

"Why repeat ancient history, my friend? And not such damned pretty history after all. I've been thinking. I might have a daughter some day. Well, I know what's the pleasantest way for a daughter to think of a mother. I've tried one way and now I've just been trying another, taught me here. I like Mr. Branster's way better. It's the way I'd like my daughter to think of me."

"You don't seem to be thinking of me much," he protested, still angry.

"I don't know that I'm not. You've a daughter already, Tom, now that you mention it. And we were fixing a pretty way for her to think of her father, weren't we?"

"Oh, my wife will see to it anyhow that the child has a pretty way of thinking."

"Your wife?" drawled Branster, whom they had forgotten, in a soft voice but with an odd intonation that made them both turn quickly toward him. "You're a married man, are you? And you got *her* to come down here with you, did you?"

"I came of my own accord," began the girl, "and nothing wrong has happened."

"Don't interfere, honey," he stopped her, and one arm went paternally around her shoulders.

"The noon train's a good train for leaving town, mister. The folks at Tomocala ain't likely to be wanting you to stay on long after they hears this story. They ain't likely to make it any too comfortable for you."

"Don't interfere, please." This was Tom Halton speaking. "I don't care a rip what any one here thinks or does—except Miss Stevens."

"I reckon it's a good train," she answered, oddly enough falling into the phrase and cadence of John Branster. "You take it to-day and I'll take it to-morrow."

"And that's the end of all between you and me, is it?"

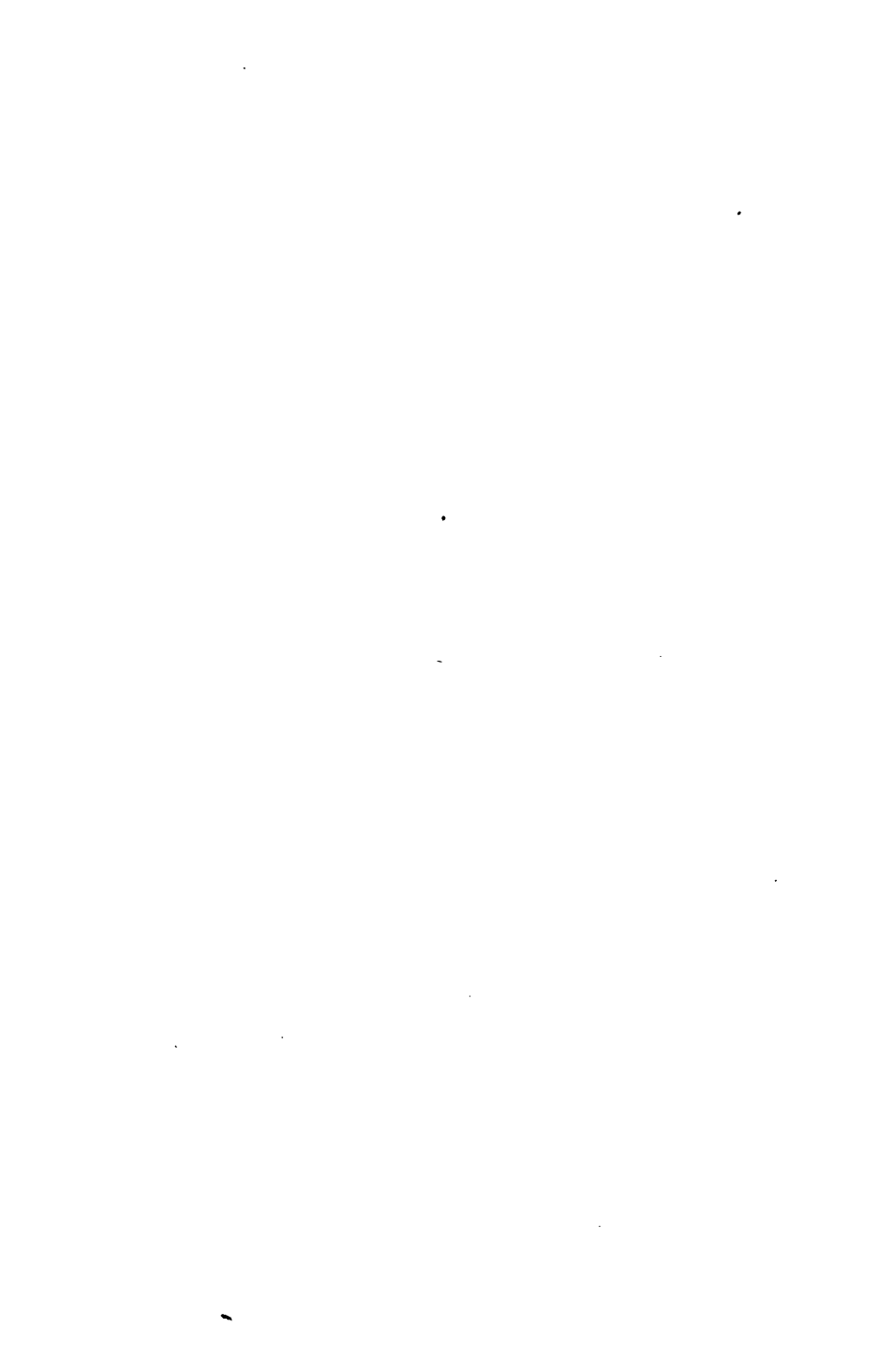
"Dreams have to end. And to begin," she added inconsequentially, and took a step away from Branster toward the low violet-bordered mound. Then she held out her hand.

"Good-by, Tom. This won't be the last time for you, I'm afraid, so I'll wish you pleasant dreams. This was a pleasant dream while it lasted—until I woke up and found that I was beautiful and good. Go back to New York and tell them I'm that."

It was a hard leave-taking, and as he went he saw her smiling brilliantly at him, the famous smile that helped to make her famous.

But a minute later John Branster bent over, and patted her head awkwardly as she lay sobbing by the mossy, gray headstone that carried only the letters H. S.

"Go ahead and cry, honey," he said; "that's what your mamma would want you to do."



The Importance of Being Mrs. Cooper

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MRS. COOPER

IT began at lunch one day at Betsey Ferris's. The meal was already notable, so Johnny Fairchild told me, for a triumph of Mrs. Ferris's cook, by which a boned chicken was somehow put inside a boned young turkey, a guinea-hen inside the chicken, a squab inside the guinea-hen and finally a quail inside the squab, so that in the end you cut straight across these incredible geological food-strata as if you were sawing through a Chinese puzzle. The production of this *chef d'œuvre* along with the presence of an excellent light Barsac had already made the social atmosphere particularly agreeable.

This, of course, all happened in antebellum days when none of us saw anything much wrong in a social atmosphere's being agreeable. Johnny Fairchild has been in France, Ernest Wilmerding was at Foggia, in Italy, for the aviation, and so on. Things are different now. In those days there was no great merit, perhaps, in any one who was lunching that day—but they were all gay, pleasant, good-looking people, and, for better or for worse, they came very close to running New York society. There is probably no great harm, in these serious days, in trying to recapture something of the tone of a period which is not likely ever to come back, and to compile, while we may, what

the French call "memoirs to serve for the writing of history." Viewed in this light, the whole business about Mrs. Cooper is almost historical, and so Mrs. Ferris's lunch and that quail so richly and abundantly inclosed become worth our attention, for it was on this occasion that Mrs. Cooper appeared, or didn't appear—whichever may be the more accurate way to describe the event—for the first time.

It began with Edgar Walton, and here at once I perceive that I was wrong in describing the young men present as engaged in running New York society. Walton neither ran nor was run. He was the kind of quiet person who could go everywhere, just because he was Walton, but rarely did. Every one liked him, but no one saw much of him. He was reserved rather than in any way mysterious. But in the end it comes to about the same thing—no one knew a great deal about his private life. He was reported once to have said to Mrs. Barfax, who is from Michigan, that he went very little into New York society because he liked seeing New-Yorkers. But on the whole the speech doesn't sound like the kindly, calm, amiable Edgar we all know. However, all this is neither here nor there. Our story begins when the Ferrises' butler, while they were still on the concentric birds, bent over Edgar, and Edgar, rising, said that Mrs. Cooper wished to speak to him on the telephone.

"I saw through it at once," said Johnny Fairchild, reporting the matter to me in some secrecy, when he let me into the great Mrs. Cooper cult. "It was obvious."

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"Of course," announced Johnny to the table, "there is no Mrs. Cooper."

"Obviously not," assented Eva Morpont.

"But it's an excellent alibi," went on Johnny. "I shall always say it is Mrs. Cooper wanting me on the telephone."

"So shall I!" And then Mrs. Morpont turned to Edgar, who was just coming back.

"How is dear Mrs. Cooper?" she asked, very sweetly. And as he stared at her rather coldly, she went on, quickly: "Oh, we all think she is an excellent invention, Edgar. She's going to mean a great deal in all our lives."

After that, by Mrs. Ferris's account, nothing much more was thought about Mrs. Cooper, although I can believe that there must have been a suspicious twinkle in Johnny Fairchild's eye.

A little later, as she rose to go, Mrs. Knox turned to Johnny.

"Can you dine on Tuesday next, Mr. Fairchild?" His reply came with no perceptible pause:

"I'm sorry I can't. I'm dining that night with Mrs. Cooper." (Edgar Walton, it may be mentioned, had already gone.)

"Oh, are you?" exclaimed Mrs. Morpont. "Then I shall see you. That's nice."

Ellen Knox looked slightly annoyed. "Are you two always asked out together nowadays?" she inquired, not quite without malice, perhaps. She had evidently meant to ask Eva for Tuesday, too.

She may have been annoyed, but she is no fool.

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There was a singularly awful party with music of some kind at the Grenville Fram's that night, and these same two ladies encountered each other, and unfortunately their host, just as they were about to make a quite shamelessly premature escape.

"You're not going, Mrs. Knox," protested old Mr. Fram, with a great deal of manner.

"I'm so sorry," and she flashed one look at Eva Morpont, "but I really must look in at Mrs. Cooper's. I was engaged to her weeks ago and she'd never forgive me."

"Cooper? Cooper?" mumbled old Mr. Fram.

"Oh, don't try to make us believe that you don't know every charming woman in New York," Mrs. Morpont cut in with. "I must go, too, Cousin Fred. Explain to Cousin Ella, won't you, that I'd really promised Beatrice Cooper before I got her card."

Mrs. Knox was not to be outdone. "Dear Beatrice!" she breathed, softly. "She's so firm, for all she's so sweet."

"Yes, of course," assented Mr. Grenville Fram. It was evident that most honestly he was beginning to remember Mrs. Cooper.

At that moment young Mr. Fairchild, with young Mr. Wilmerding, drifted toward them.

"Johnny," said Mrs. Morpont, "if you and Ernest are going on to Mrs. Cooper's I'll give you a lift. And there's Betsey Ferris. Make her come along, too."

After they were safely outside, it appeared that Johnny had telephoned to Mrs. Cooper, and she had said her party for that night was so small that she

had decided to make it supper at the Biltmore, where they could dance.

Even at the restaurant door, Johnny kept it up. "Mrs. Cooper telephoned for a table, didn't she?" he asked of Henri. And when the good head waiter looked confused, Mr. Fairchild compromised by himself taking one of the best tables for her. Mrs. Cooper was unaccountably delayed (Johnny paid the bill for her), but her party was considerably better than the Frams'.

From now on the pen of a philosophic historian would be needed to describe the growth of Mrs. Cooper's vogue among our best people. Of course in the end probably not more than twenty ever were told of her purely imaginary quality. But those twenty who were supposed to know her were carefully picked. (That I was in the secret I consider the greatest tribute of friendship Johnny Fairchild ever paid me.) It was just our heroine's exclusiveness that made her lovely legend flower so.

Mrs. Cooper—I never got really to call her Beatrice—was in no Blue Book or Social Register, and her friends got no farther as to her address than to speak of her charming house in the East Sixties. Here in an enchanting environment she lurked, and to describe her special note an old story, originally told of another famous lady, was revived, and it was alleged that Mrs. Cooper's dining-room contained only eight chairs and that she said in defense of this meagerness of equipment that there weren't more than seven people in New York that one cared to have for dinner—at one time, of course.

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It was astonishing how little Mrs. Cooper went out. She stayed at home because she found her own house and her own food and her own parties so much better than other people's, a judgment in which her friends heartily concurred. It was no wonder, for the hostess herself had every grace of nature and every adornment of art. Her person was, it was universally admitted by her friends, of an exquisite loveliness, of an unequalled radiance of beauty. She was indescribable, some one said. It was rather a pity that this had not been true—there was an extremely critical moment when it appeared that Ernest Wilmerding *had* described her to some one as an absolutely dazzling blonde, while Eustace Henry had to some one else seemed to hint at hair like the raven's wing. Johnny Fairchild, as generalissimo of the Mrs. Cooper forces, held hurried secret conferences and in spite of the two young men's protests, the lady's hair from then on was officially "darkish, but shot with gold," whatever that description may exactly mean.

She had delicious tastes, of course, for music and all the arts. And one constantly heard the most wonderful singers and performers there in a most informal way. We were never too specific in our statements, for Mrs. Cooper disliked having her parties talked about. But the house was unquestionably the most delightful in New York. Of course, besides New-Yorkers, everybody of importance and title from abroad went there—Mrs. Cooper had lived much abroad and, of course, knew everybody there.

She had a way with foreigners—I took young Prince Begnitelli, who by chance hadn't known her in Rome,

on to her house from a largish dinner, at Mrs. Barfax's, and he became at once one of her most ardent admirers. He was always leaving everything and everybody to go to her, and people began to wonder if she thought Princess a pretty title. I have forgotten, by the way, to mention that the less said about the late Cooper the better. We drew a veil, but we admitted that his poor dear wife must have suffered terribly. In any case, nothing ever came of Begnitelli's courting, as this story in time will show.

I must say for us that we were discreet, that we did not overdo the thing. Even Edgar Walton, who is not much on jokes, took it up. He smiled knowingly and said that nothing that could be said about Mrs. Cooper was half as flattering as the truth. And Johnny Fairchild, who had never much liked him, admitted that Edgar was a good fellow. It was not long before Mrs. Cooper had the very nicest position in New York. Young Mr. Fairchild told Mrs. Morpont to her face at a fairly large dinner that he considered Mrs. Cooper the most fashionable woman in New York, a statement which, made to Eva, who had unquestionably, up to this time, been that herself, could not be beaten. Eva, who was sweet about it, pointed out to Johnny (and to others who were listening) that with some show of justice she might claim that it was perhaps her own support of Beatrice which had in the beginning helped our lovely friend to her present position.

"Now if Mrs. Barfax had had you as her friend—" began Johnny.

"Yes, but she hadn't. And hasn't now, so far as I

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know," Eva smiled, but her tone was, for her, acid.

And thus we introduce Mrs. Barfax. It ought not to be necessary to introduce her to any reader. Though Eva Morpont did not like her, or thought she didn't, a great many other people in New York did, or thought they did. And the newspapers went on about her like mad. She was, and is, an extremely handsome, amiable, generous woman. It was her amiability and her sense of humor that made even Johnny Fairchild her friend. He had once accepted a dinner invitation of hers, and then written the next day, really with scandalous impertinence, to say that he couldn't dine, as he had just discovered that he had a subsequent engagement. Mrs. Barfax laughed and said that she loved him for it.

For such qualities most people forgave her frankly proclaimed social ambitions. But Eva Morpont would not ask her to the house nor go to hers. And, it is needless to say, Mrs. Barfax did not know Mrs. Cooper. Equally needless to say that she wanted to and meant to. It is probable that it got to a point where the very mention of Mrs. Cooper got on Mrs. Barfax's nerves.

I made, perhaps, a mistake earlier in speaking of those as days before the war—I should have specified before what kind of war I meant. Mrs. Morpont and Mrs. Barfax inevitably were meeting, as they went to many of the same houses, and the state of tension between them grew till it may almost be said that they were belligerents.

This was the condition in January when Mrs. Morpont had sent out cards for what was to be her most

definitely exclusive party of the winter, a smallish dinner, only eighty, and perhaps a hundred people in afterward for a half-hour of Zimbalist. It was, I think, rather expected by most of the people who were asked that they would on this occasion meet Mrs. Cooper. But Eva sighed lightly and said that no, alas! dear Beatrice could not be tempted to leave her own charming fireside for so large a function. Mrs. Barfax was also not to be at Mrs. Morpont's, for different reasons. And no one could much blame her if, four days before Mrs. Morpont's party, which was to be on the 15th, Mrs. Barfax issued invitations for the same night. It was a risk, but there was reason enough for her to run it. Caruso and Josef Hofmann were excellent cards to play. But Mrs. Barfax had more and better—in fact, her hand was all trumps. Delicately written in on one corner of her invitations were these epoch-making words, "To meet Mrs. Cooper!"

There was never in my own mind any question as to which of the two parties I should attend, and I had no great doubt as to how others would behave. But I had no intention of waiting till the 15th to know more. I got my card by the four-thirty delivery and in fifteen minutes I was afoot on the Avenue on my way to Stella Barfax's. And from now on the story is my own as much as Johnny Fairchild's, which, since I had not been at Betsey Ferris's for lunch that first day, is fortunate for me.

I had anticipated something of a crush and I was not surprised to meet Johnny at the door. In the drawing-room was Mrs. Graham Perkins, probably the oldest living white woman and certainly the only per-

son in New York who didn't know or care about Mrs. Cooper. She was about ten minutes saying good-by and going, which is, for her, record fast time. That left Ernest Wilmerding, Eustace Henry, Mrs. Knox, and Johnny and me at last. Then we went into immediate action.

Johnny murmured something about how delightful it was that our hostess had induced dear Mrs. Cooper to break her rule and go out.

Mrs. Barfax smiled expansively. Her eye twinkled. There was no fear or nervousness about her.

"Yes, isn't it?" she answered.

She still merely smiled. The nervous tension was racking. Mrs. Barfax was clearly enjoying herself. Finally she saw we could not bear it much longer, so she explained further:

"Dear Ernest Wilmerding is arranging it all for me. You see, I don't know her. But he's bringing her."

Ernest Wilmerding had been one of the original conspirators. Johnny looked at him aghast.

"You are, Ernest? Whom are you bringing?"

"Mrs. Cooper, Johnny. Beatrice is doing it for me. I tell her she ought to go out more and—" Ernest was going on fatuously when we suddenly became aware that Eustace Henry had risen to his feet and was like a black thundercloud overhanging us all.

"I had hoped to have the pleasure of introducing Mrs. Cooper to you, Mrs. Barfax. In fact, I was talking with her about it last evening. And it's rather curious that she said nothing to me about Ernest Wilmerding or any arrangement he had made."

Mrs. Barfax already looked ten years older. "Ernest!" she gasped.

"I was talking with Mrs. Cooper last evening myself," he said, in what I believe is called a low, tense voice. "There is no possible question of her not coming to you. You may trust me."

"I'm not sure I do, Ernest," she answered, with a helpless, lost kind of laugh. And as Eustace brightened at this, "Nor you, Eustace, either," she said. "Oh, what is it all about?" she wailed.

"It sounds to me," I ventured to suggest, "as though they were not the same Mrs. Cooper."

Johnny rose now, fairly pale with emotion. "There is but one Mrs. Cooper!"

I do not mean to be irreligious, but he had somewhat the air of Mohammed reciting his creed.

At this moment Mrs. Knox, who is at heart a light-minded, trivial woman, laughed. It relieved the strain.

"Eustace," said Mrs. Barfax, turning to young Mr. Henry, "does your Mrs. Cooper live at fifteen and a half East Sixty-fourth Street? Is she an extremely pretty and cultivated woman with lovely golden hair? Is she a friend of all of you? Is she *the* Mrs. Cooper?"

"My Mrs. Cooper," replied Eustace, with a very dark, passionate air of pride, "is an extremely pretty, cultivated woman. She is a friend of all of us—except possibly Ernest. She is *the* Mrs. Cooper. But she has, as a matter of fact, lately given up her house and is at the Ritz. Furthermore, she has almost black hair; indeed, she considers bleached golden hair the height of vulgarity."

This all may sound comic, but to us there the note

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struck was rather of tragedy. Mrs. Barfax trembled on the verge of tears. Johnny was better controlled, but he seemed as one who stood in the wreckage of his life's fairest work. He looked very noble, it is not to be denied.

"Mrs. Barfax," he said, "*I will tell you the truth. There is no Mrs. Cooper.*"

"Oh, dear me, dear me! Is she dead?"

"No; there never was any Mrs. Cooper. We invented her."

He explained things a little more to the stricken woman in a grave, sad voice.

"We made for her," he finished up with, "a position in New York such as never was by sea or land."

"That's the sickening waste of it, quite apart from my trouble," observed Mrs. Barfax. "This wonderful social position, and no one to use it."

At almost the same moment Eustace and Ernest burst forth, as one man, "That's what we thought."

Each, so it appeared, had been trying to hatch a Mrs. Cooper, if that phrase is permissible.

Ernest showed us his Mrs. Cooper's photograph—he carried it in a green morocco case. She was, quite unmistakably, Trixie Cooper who had been in "Oh, Pshaw!" though I'm sure no one ever knew then that she was Mrs. anything. She had left the stage and seemed to disappear. Now everything was explained.

Eustace had, unfortunately, no photograph. His Mrs. Cooper was, as her raven locks made plausible, slightly Oriental in origin, but very highly, though distantly, connected with the London Rothschilds. She

was an enchanting creature, so Eustace averred. So she is, I can now testify.

"But, dear boys, it doesn't seem to me that either of them will exactly do as *my* Mrs. Cooper, as Mrs. Morpont's Mrs. Cooper," came from our hostess.

"Well, perhaps not," we all agreed. In any case, to choose either of these ladies seemed to involve bloodshed between their respective champions, who continued to look death and destruction at each other.

Mrs. Barfax was despairingly turning over the telephone-book.

"There are such a lot of Mrs. Coopers!" she wailed.

"How about Edgar Walton's?" I asked.

"Has he a Mrs. Cooper?" she asked.

"It would seem that every young man in New York society has one, except me," I commented. "But as I remember the story Johnny told me, Edgar had his first."

There was no time wasted. The butler telephoned Edgar, who was discovered at the Knickerbocker Club, and told him to come to Mrs. Barfax's on a matter of life and death. We were exhausted and had tea. Johnny and the belligerents had whisky and soda, and our hostess explained that she was ruined and might as well leave New York. She was even cheerful in a kind of hysterical way, and we discussed whether socially she could ever make her way in Brooklyn. Finally Edgar arrived, breathless.

"Do you know Mrs. Cooper?" Mrs. Barfax asked before he was fairly inside the door.

"I do."

"But I mean really. No joking."

"But I do really. I was never joking about her." He smiled almost patronizingly at us. "I never much cared for you fellows' joke."

"Is she radiantly beautiful and the most charming creature in the world?"

"I think so," said Edgar.

"Is she really Mrs. Cooper?"

"No, she really isn't."

"I knew it," said Mrs. Barfax.

At this Edgar only walked over to his hostess's writing-table and appeared to hunt among her letters.

"Ah," he said, holding one of them up. "You haven't opened it yet. It's the announcement. We were married very quietly two weeks ago at her uncle's in St. Louis. We've just got back. It's been more or less of a secret till now."

"St. Louis!" gasped Mrs. Knox.

"You married her?" screamed Mrs. Barfax. "Well, you can divorce her! In time for the fifteenth. You should be ashamed of yourself, Mr. Walton."

It didn't appear he was. He started to tell us how she was in mourning and that that was why it was all quietly done, etc., etc.—all things quite unconnected with the present emergency. But no one much listened. Everybody talked at once, but from time to time you could hear Mrs. Barfax insisting that she was a lost soul.

All joking aside, her position *was* excessively awkward.

By this time it was about six-thirty and what now happened was historic. Mrs. Barfax was continuing to lament.

"Of course," she said, "I was trying to spoil Mrs. Morpont's party. Now she'll spoil mine and me and make me just a scoff and a byword in New York."

It seemed reasonably likely to happen when—well, there was a hurried movement outside the doors. Two footmen opened them, quite as if they were admitting royalty. And there stood a radiantly beautiful creature, her eyes twinkling with humor and her very presence radiating fashion. She was all that Mrs. Cooper should be. Naturally, since she was Eva Morpont.

"I just had to come, my dear," she said, as she advanced to Mrs. Barfax. "I think you are too wonderful and too darling and too humorous. I've been horrid to you, but when I got that enchanting invitation of yours I saw that I must know you better."

Mrs. Barfax and Eva clasped hands. They are both, in their ways, great women. Mrs. Barfax, for example, made no attempt to explain anything; she just let Eva have her head.

"We don't want two parties spoiling each other that night. Now, my dear Mrs. Barfax, shall I come to yours or will you come to mine?"

"Your invitations were out first," replied Stella Barfax. "I think I'll come to yours."

"That's nice of you, dear. And really it's just as well. I've just come from Beatrice Cooper's. She's not well, and the doctor has ordered her South at once."

"I think I'll join her at Palm Beach later," said Mrs. Barfax.

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"Do, dear! She's so fond of you, I know," replied Eva.

The two ladies are now great friends. But no one but Mrs. Cooper could have brought them together. In fact, there just is no one in New York like Mrs. Cooper. There never has been.

The Sad Case of Quag



THE SAD CASE OF QUAG

IN the third year of its existence the Lake City Women's Club chose for its winter course of reading, Mesopotamia, its history and antiquities. Some of the more ardent students thought that in a five months' period they ought to cover Assyria and Persia as well, but in the interests of thoroughness it was decided to limit the ladies to the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates, whose thirty or forty centuries of resounding history they could thus master with comparative ease.

In the fiftieth year of his life Mr. Samuel Quag was still where he had been for a quarter of a century, in the Oriental Section of the British Museum; more narrowly and definitely he was Curator of Chaldean Antiquities, and one of the three leading European authorities upon a subject which no longer strikingly excites popular interest—if indeed it ever did.

That these third and fiftieth years respectively should happen to be contemporaneous will seem to no one a reason why the Lake City Women's Club and Mr. Quag should be more closely linked by fate. Chaldaea is dim in the mist of ages; her ancient magic arts must by now have lost their force even over latter-day votaries of her mysterious wisdom. Yet some ironic, though not all unkindly, spell, playing to and fro across the Atlantic, in that thin blue where wire-

less messages flash, was surely at work. Some inevitable spark from the flint and steel that the Old and New World are was appointed to be struck out and to light up for at least a little while the murk of that quiet room at the back of the gaunt gray Bloomsbury building where Quag pored over musty volumes. Magic it must have been, for Chaldea is not as remote from Great Russell Street as is Lake City, Wisconsin, a pretty and prosperous little town, lying between the blue of the small Lake Peterson and Lake Edna, nor are the darkest of her immemorial mysteries as obscure to Samuel Quag as would have been, up to the time of the episodes now to be related, the ceaseless intellectual activity of American females. To us here there is something at once ludicrous and pathetic in the spectacle of the Lake City Club at close quarters with Mesopotamia. There will perhaps be something also to move to laughter and tears in the story of the Curator of Chaldean Antiquities grappling with American Woman.

There had never been much to vary the monotony of that quarter-century of Quag's service at the Museum. There was an occasional congress, on the Continent, of learned men, which it was suitable that he should attend. He had in this way visited Berlin, Paris, and Utrecht in Holland. Oftenest, when such opportunities presented themselves, his mother, who was a confirmed invalid, and his only close friend, had not been well enough for him to leave her. He had unquestioningly remained by her side. Indeed, though he scarcely realized it himself, he had just as unquestioningly stayed there for the most of his life. Their

income left almost no margin after the bills for the neat little house in Pembroke Crescent were paid, and the necessary expenses of respectable living incurred. The combination of circumstances had perhaps a little limited his life.

Each morning he went to the Museum—after they built the Tube this was an easier matter—each evening he came home. At his desk there was always work enough to be done, work for the Library itself or for some monograph he might happen to be writing. The mind inevitably focused itself upon the local affairs of the Museum—and upon Chaldea. As the years went on the other men about him seemed to Mr. Quag to grow older, snuffier, and more narrowly absorbed in their own subjects. They appeared to him to think somehow that their own branches of learning were equal to if not better than Mr. Quag's own. (This of course was exactly their feeling about Mr. Quag had he but known it.) With the exception of a few correspondents abroad, mostly Germans, few human creatures seemed to offer much sympathy with him in his chosen subject. He was thrown back more and more, as it were, upon Chaldea herself.

Familiarity had done something to obscure the almost romantic interest of his early days, as had also the great accumulations of his learning, which lay in heaps, so one might fancy, like the refuse of excavations which almost hid the very temple they had uncovered. Yet, in spite of this, imagination there still was in Samuel Quag, which glowed for him sometimes like a coal still live beneath the ashes gathered since years ago he put it within his breast. He felt

the majesty of the great distant Asiatic valley down which have rolled since before the beginnings of time those mighty rivers. He was held fascinated by the baffling mystery of that ancient civilization, and as Chaldean priests from their towers tried to read the secret of the world in the stars, so had he from the gray fastnesses of the Museum attempted to decipher old Chaldea from her few surviving traces. But he was, and he had come to think it natural and obvious enough, as lonely as one of those old watchers of the night.

His mother, so far as she was interested in his work at all, which was not much, would have preferred him to be an Egyptologist; she might then, she thought, have given him more help, more sympathy in his career. From this it is not to be argued that she was in any sense a learned woman, or indeed knew anything whatever about this rival of Chaldea's with which she was coquetting. Her reasons for her preference were, in fact, fantastically feminine and trifling, yet profoundly characteristic of her and of her charm.

Years before, just about the time when the family budget began to show a little margin for artistic purchases, Mrs. Quag saw somewhere a collection of Egyptian bead jewelry. Dainty, gay, attractive fragments of a great solemn past they were, no one could deny. They turned this special admirer completely to Egypt. For many years her son spent much of his time and much of his money in pleasing this taste. Her collection, sold at Christy's a year or two ago, astonished a handful of connoisseurs by its richness and the real delicacy of taste with which it had been

chosen. Its effect would have been greater could they have seen the jewels in the little chintz drawing-room in Pembroke Crescent, with their owner displaying them in their three pretty maple cabinets inlaid with green and gold.

It was all so like Mrs. Quag, who had been lovely as a girl of twenty, and as a somewhat bent and shriveled invalid of seventy still kept something of earlier manners and graces, wore bows of pink ribbon with a certain air, and disposed her lace flounces to their best advantage on the sofa where she was forced to lie—in not inconsiderable pain—so much of the time. She was every inch of woman, and even with her son, one might say, mixed some poor little faded coquetry with her mother's smiles. She would have been jealous of a daughter-in-law. But indeed there was little enough possibility of such a person. The son was growing older faster far than the mother, and his leisure was so completely absorbed, so taken by her as if it were her due, that Samuel Quag would never have had time to win a wife, had it ever occurred to him that he wanted one, or could have one. Almost literally he never did think of such a thing. He only came home every evening, kissed his mother, and learned that she was tired. Sometimes she had had visitors at tea-time, sometimes not. In either case she was not strong enough for much talk with him. Privately in her heart of hearts she thought her son a little dull—as indeed it must be frankly admitted he was. But she was always glad when he was to stay in that evening. He generally “stayed in” of an evening. He faintly realized that he was a little dull,

and half understood that he was a little sad, and next morning, when he was off to the Museum and Chaldea, he dimly comprehended that both were lands a little lonely, but perhaps for that the better suited to such solitary old things as he.

All this still seems very far from Wisconsin and the Lake City Women's Club. But the reader has not, perhaps, counted on Mrs. Oliver Dawson, rising, refreshed from breakfast in a respectable boarding establishment in Upper Bedford Place, and prepared to go forth, of a lovely June morning, and deal competently with London.

It seems almost preposterous that one should have to explain Mrs. Dawson. But Lake City is not the world—though it is possibly the world's misfortune. There is no one else like Mrs. Dawson in Lake City. This is perhaps Lake City's misfortune, and yet possibly in one small community there would not be place for two women so cheerful, so kind, so breezy, and so masterful. Every one was sympathetic with her sorrow when Oliver Dawson died, yet, to venture upon figurative language, one felt that the whole world must first perish before such a woman could be adequately widowed, if widowed were to mean shattered, weak, dependent, or unprotected. She had lived happily with her husband for twenty years, there could be no question as to the genuineness of the tears she unabashedly shed. Yet her optimism and her vitality irresistibly drove her forward. After the first tumult of grief had subsided she began to "take notice," as the phrase goes, almost at once. But the "notice" was not especially of men who might aspire to succeed Oliver, but

of Lake City and of the world at large. This was the third summer of her widowed state; she had put off the black of mourning, and was, for the first time in her life, abroad.

Two arduous weeks of sightseeing had disposed of most of London. Mrs. Dawson promised herself a day of leisure. She consequently rose exceptionally early, for what she was pleased to term her rest generally required quite as much activity as did most people's work. There was first of all a water-proof coat to be purchased at the Army and Navy Stores. Then an umbrella in the Burlington Arcade. A Liberty scarf or two, for presents, in Regent Street. Then a loose knit jacketty kind of thing of fine Shetland wool, to be worn in extra-cold weather inside the bodice (the author has been told the exact name for this garment, but declines to use it), this to be found especially, cheaply, satisfactorily, at—here the address-book became necessary.

A Miss Fox of Springfield, Massachusetts, encountered in a railway carriage between Chester and Leamington, had, Mrs. Dawson remembered, given her an address for these things. The book was promptly produced, and the goal discovered to be Peter Robinson's in Oxford Street.

Knitted jackets have little enough to do with this or any other story, but trifling coincidences may cause even greater events than any here to be related. On the page facing that on which was inscribed Miss Fox's information Mrs. Dawson saw something which she had utterly and unaccountably forgotten. It was a list, given her by Mrs. George Tillson, of books which

they had failed to get the winter before in connection with the Club's course of study. Mrs. Dawson had said in her speech at the meeting at which, preparatory to this trip abroad, she resigned the Club presidency that she thought they should start a library, which would enable members to continue, privately and at their leisure, reading on any subject which had especially interested them in the winter's work. She remembered now that when Abbie Tillson gave her this list the idea had come that these books on Mesopotamia would be a suitable offering by an ex-president toward the founding of such a library. On the way from the Stores to Peter Robinson's, Mrs. Dawson stopped at a bookseller's, where her interview with the polite frock-coated salesman gave her food for thought. She bought the jacketty thing later with slightly hurried and abstracted air, and then drove straight to the British Museum. The man at the book shop had told her that he could not at once tell her where he could procure two or three of the books on her list. Now Delia Dawson was not a woman accustomed to be either balked or delayed in any enterprise she undertook. She had asked the young man rather sarcastically, if he could tell her who in London would know about Mesopotamia books, since he didn't. He, thinking himself equally sarcastic and more subtle, had sent her to the Museum.

Mr. Quag had had a worrying day, full of niggling matters of detail. It happened that this had been preceded by a bad night for his mother and consequently for himself. The card of a strange woman who offered no explanation of her intrusion was only an added

annoyance. Mr. Quag was pawing fretfully at the papers on his desk and wondering whether he was likely to have a headache, when Mrs. Dawson entered. He half glanced up at her, and, without rising, made a kind of gesture toward a chair.

The lady stopped, and there was for a moment silence. Mr. Quag fumbled on his desk. Then she spoke.

"My card, sir, preceded me!"

An angry duchess could scarcely have done better. It fetched Quag to his feet, and as if by magic the card was in his hand and his glasses adjusted to read it.

"Won't you have a chair, Mrs. Dawson?" Then for the first time he really looked at her, as she came across the dusty sunlight of his room.

Delia Dawson had been a handsome girl; with the years she had grown majestic, Amazonian, or, if a homelier phrase is preferred, Dutch-built, ready for any rough seas or any new experiences life might bring. Somehow Mr. Quag at once got a sense of something more alive than were the withered female students he occasionally received. The advancing goddess, easily propitiated, as are kindly divinities, now smiled, and offered some kind of an apology for troubling him.

"Not at all, not at all," asserted Mr. Quag, nervously eager. "What can I do for you?"

What he could and did do for her cannot better be shown than by returning to the annals of the Lake City Women's Club. In early August there arrived from London, as a donation to the Club's library from

its late president, a box of some seventy books on Chaldea. They had been selected by Mr. Samuel Quag of the British Museum, a great Chaldeologist, and incidentally, so she wrote, a great friend of Delia Dawson's. Their arrival gave universal satisfaction, so Mrs. Tillson, the new president, wrote to Mrs. Dawson. And indeed it was only Miss Sarah Marshall, the treasurer, who had paid from the Club funds \$26.73 as duty and freight on the shipment, who felt a moment's doubt. "Still, I suppose you can't look a gift box of books in the mouth," she meditated. There came a day when she reproached herself with not acting firmly at the very outset.

Mrs. Bellville, the secretary, wrote letters of thanks, both to Mrs. Dawson and Mr. Quag. From both she received replies, but it is more especially in the latter's communication that we have an interest.

He regretted, so he wrote, that there were several books which he had been unable to secure at the time. These, however, he was on the track of. Mrs. Dawson, when she left London, had been good enough to appoint him, in an informal way, the representative of their Club in England. This was a rare and unusual honour—he spelled it, of course, with a "u."

This elegance of phraseology gave much pleasure when the letter was read before the Club. Abbie Tillson, who was "considerable of a reader," had found several complimentary references, in books in the Club's library, to Quag as an authority, and the general feeling was that the Club and the female sex were being suitably appreciated, though of course not more than was their due.

This September meeting, it was felt, opened the season in a most interesting way, and the ladies were keenly eager to begin the approaching winter's work. They turned refreshed as it were from Chaldea to Rome. It was planned to get through with Rome (bringing its history down to Garibaldi's entrance) by the New Year, since it is neither a very hard nor exacting subject. After that for the latter half-year it was planned to do the Women of the French Salons, always a favorite study with women's clubs, and generally a light and spring-like subject. Chaldea was in some danger of being forgotten, had it not been for Mrs. Dawson.

For three or four months Mrs. Dawson remembered Mr. Quag quite well—thought of him frequently, in fact. She told every separate member of the Lake City Club how she had been twice to see him at the Museum on business, how he had once walked home with her, and taken tea with her in Upper Bedford Place, and how, crowning episode! he had suggested that if she ever came to the Museum toward one o'clock he would like to give her lunch in the excellent Thackeray Temperance Hotel near by. She had not been able to accept this last invitation, tendered unfortunately just as she was leaving town, but she considered it, and was willing that the ladies of Lake City should also consider it as a gallant attention. She did not exactly resent being twitted about Mr. Quag. But then she also showed little objection to being joked about Mr. Thompson, the Minneapolis gentleman of the Paris pension; Mr. Percy Hazzard, the young newspaper man whom she met at Stratford-on-

Avon; or Doctor Sickleson of the good ship *Miskawinka*, aboard which she had traversed the Atlantic in both directions. Later she scarcely denied insinuations as to various local Lake City males. Mr. Quag gradually faded from her mind. And, to tell the truth, reading upon Mesopotamian subjects was not frequent enough among the club-women—now “simply fascinated” by Rome—to keep him prominently before them.

It was in February that Miss Marshall, the treasurer, had what may fairly be called a rude awakening. She arrived at Mrs. Dawson's house one morning on her way down-town, her lips closed ominously, and a letter with a foreign stamp tightly gripped in her hand.

“I thought I'd come to you, Delia,” she began, “before I went before the Club with this matter.”

“What matter, please?” asked Mrs. Dawson, a little sharply.

“I don't think I quite understood what directions you left with your friend Mr. Quag in London, or exactly by what authority.”

“I don't know what you're talking about, Sarah. But I know that Mr. Quag has done our Club a great honor in being interested in it at all.”

“Well, our Club is paying for it,” retorted Miss Marshall. “He has written saying he has shipped more books.”

“That's very nice of him.”

“And he enclosed the bookseller's bill. For a hundred and fifty dollars!”

Even Mrs. Dawson gasped. As she did so her friend continued:

"What does he think? That we are going on studying about that horrid old Chaldea all our lives?"

Now, as a matter of fact, poor Mr. Quag in London might well have thought this. Mrs. Dawson had told him nothing of the course on the Renaissance which had preceded Chaldea, nor of the comprehensive surveys of Rome and eighteenth-century France which were so swiftly to follow it. He who had devoted his life to the subject could hardly have been expected to understand how after one winter the club-women of Lake City, Wisconsin, could toss great Mesopotamia aside like a sucked orange. Faint pricks of conscience seemed mysteriously to tell Mrs. Dawson something of how he felt. She turned sharply on Miss Sarah Marshall.

"I guess it would do us no harm to go on studying about Chaldea a little longer; none of us knows any too much about it; and as for its being horrid, I don't know as Nero and Heliogabalus are such nice subjects for an unmarried woman, even of your age, Sarah! As to those books," she went on, "you needn't trouble the Club to pay for them. I shall be glad to do that myself."

And then, in the heat of her pride and anger, was struck out a flash of that full-blooded generous humanity which made her beloved in Lake City and sent her that day into the dingy room at the Museum as if blown on some inspiring vitalizing wind from the great western hemisphere.

"And, Sarah, you needn't tell the Club that I'm paying. Say Mr. Quag sends the books as a present."

Sarah had been angry. Now in spite of herself she suddenly kissed Delia.

"I'm sorry I said what I did," she murmured.

"I'm sorry I said what I did," answered Mrs. Dawson. "So we'll just let the whole thing be our secret."

Mrs. Bellville, the secretary, wrote politely, even warmly, to Mr. Quag. But more to our purpose will be an extract or two from Mrs. Dawson's letter of the same date.

"I want you to understand how we ladies of Lake City, Wisconsin, are honored" (she spelled it, of course, without the "u") "by knowing such a scholar as yourself. We are not scholars; of course you could tell that when you saw me. Very few American women are, in the smaller cities at any rate. It isn't so much what we are, however, as what we want to be. Women here are trying to widen the horizon for other women. And you are helping them. It's a thing, I believe, a man can be proud of, whoever he is."

It is humbly submitted that this is putting the case pretty well for women's clubs and their fantastic, often ridiculous, "cultural efforts." There is always just this something of generous altruism behind every preposterous "course of study."

"I, for one"—the quotation is again from Mrs. Dawson—"am mighty glad that when we tried to widen the horizon of Lake City we struck Chaldea, and struck you, Mr. Quag. It is an experience that makes Lake City a different kind of place."

It was also, though Mrs. Dawson could not know it, an experience which was making the British Museum a different kind of place. If Lake City was, in-

credibly enough, accumulating one of the most carefully selected small libraries on Mesopotamian subjects to be found in the country, the British Museum was coming to shelter beneath a bent and shriveled, dry-as-dust librarian's exterior a heart that in its cry for a little affectionate comradeship crossed oceans and dared to wander in distant strange lands.

There are no further letters worth quoting from. Mrs. Dawson sent a word of thanks on two further shipments of books, and also picture post-cards, once when she went to Mackinaw and again when she was in Colorado for the summer. She thought of Quag from time to time, a pleasant memory of that amazing Europe. Yet, summing it all up, one must say she forgot him. She was herself too much alive not to plunge again into the great stream of Wisconsin life that flowed all about her. She was again a prominent popular Lake City woman, known by all, liked by all its inhabitants, men and women. In a full career like hers how could a woman remember a shuffling little ghost of a man in Great Russell Street? She was not ungrateful, but she was forgetting Mr. Quag, when the letter arrived with the astonishing news of his proposed trip to America and of his offer to lecture at Lake City before the Women's Club. He, over there, had not forgotten.

His mother had died three months before, so he wrote. This left him a little freer to see something of the world. It had been natural and pleasant to think of America and of his friends in Lake City—he hoped he might venture to call them that. The letter was brief, though the Women's Club could not

guess that it was brief only because there was so much he could not bring himself to set down.

It was in the utter quiet of his mother's chintz drawing-room in Pembroke Crescent that he realized that he was at last alone in the world. Mrs. Quag had scarcely been a companion, but she had been a charge—that was something. She had not often been interested in his answer, yet she had rarely failed to ask him what was his news of the day at the Museum—hers was at least a human voice breaking his solitude. Her frivolous pretty little Egyptian collection of beads and jewels need no longer be added to; there was no one now to care. His serious collection of dull monographs and articles—so he now angrily termed them—could likewise be neglected; there was equally no one to care. What were such as he in England? he asked. The halfpenny morning paper was on the table by his side. He took it up and read a slangy and vulgar appeal to young men to rule England, to the youth to shake off pretensions to gentility and scholarship. What Britain wanted, so the writer added, was Britons who could, to borrow a transatlantic phrase, “deliver the goods.” He put down the *Daily Mail*, nauseated. He saw as in a dream the funeral-pyre of the England he had loved lit in the forecourt of the gray Museum, Chaldean inscriptions and a musty old Chaldean called Samuel Quag being the first fuel put upon its flames. Now that poor suffering Mrs. Quag was gone, there was no one in Britain to care whether her son lived or died, so he told himself.

And then as he sat with his head in his hands there

came almost inevitably the thought of Lake City, Wisconsin, and Mrs. Dawson. He did not know about the Renaissance, Rome, nor eighteenth-century France. He did not know that Sarah Marshall had called Chaldea "horrid." He only seemed to hear a voice that came across the prairies and the blue Atlantic. Off there somewhere in a young eager country there were friends who in their way cared for the same things he cared for. Perhaps they knew too little, but then perhaps he knew too much. At any rate it was there, in those primeval forests—so any Englishman must inevitably have pictured it—there that he was wanted, that he could "deliver his goods."

It was eighteen months now since he had seen Mrs. Dawson, eighteen months in which his imagination had, as it were, filled in the slight sketch of her left after her two or three irruptions into the Museum. Delia, who was in spite of her confidence and competence a modest woman, would perhaps not have recognized her portrait as it lived in Mr. Quag's mind. There she stood, against the green background of her Western woods, serene and smiling, somehow always telling Samuel Quag, tired and old though he was, that life could mean happiness, understanding, love. It is possible that this last word, even at the end, never came into his mind; certainly nothing of what it means to young people in the spring-time. Yet some red glow of autumn, some faint pulsations, some poor little flickerings of that divine fire of the world there were, unrecognized by him in his murky room in Bloomsbury as he wrote the formally polite letter to the secretary of the Lake City Women's

Club announcing his projected visit to Wisconsin.

Though the Club did not lose its head, for, after all, other distinguished lecturers on tour had tarried by Lake Peterson and Lake Edna, it was nevertheless pleased and flattered by the approaching visit of the donor of its Chaldean library. Actual interest in Chaldean had of course by this time run a little low, owing to the counter-attraction of the winter's course on the "Victorian Poets." But the Club rose to the occasion.

An evening reception was planned, and there was even a suggestion of a caterer from Milwaukee to do the refreshments. Miss Sarah Marshall and a certain element sternly opposed this, and it was felt that they were a little ungracious and ungenerous to the Club's benefactor. Mrs. Dawson was appealed to. She had traveled, she knew the habits and customs of English gentlemen, and she was, after all, the link between the Club and Mr. Quag. A little flushed, she decided for Miss Marshall and a more modest entertainment. She meant to make it up to her friend by the dinner she was to offer him before the reception.

To this dinner the reader and Mr. Quag must be hurried. The latter was a little tired and a little flustered. He had dressed at the Hotel Madison and been hustled to Mrs. Dawson's in the automobile of the Club president, Mrs. Frank Garfield Howard. He was twenty minutes ahead of time, as Mrs. Dawson had written him to be. Twenty minutes are not much yet they must be made to contain the climax of this story, and of Quag's life.

"There's one thing that has to be explained to you

Mr. Quag," began his hostess, looking quite as handsome as he had thought her. "About those books—"

"Oh, did I send you too few, or too many, or not the right ones?" asked Quag, nervously.

"Everything you did was exactly right. The difficulty was about the money. You see, the Club is not rich."

"I see," cried Quag, in agony. "I spent too much."

"Not at all. You bought them for me. I paid for them."

"You gave the Club its library! Ah, that is like you; that's the kind of thing I knew you would do. How grateful they must be to you!"

"No, to you," said Delia. And as he looked confused she went on, "I let them think you gave the books."

"Oh, but I can't allow that." Poor Quag was in agitation.

"Oh, yes. Don't you see—" and Mrs. Dawson smiled—again the serene kind goddess—as the explanation she had hunted for came at last to her lips. "You see, it would mean so much more coming from the famous Mr. Samuel Quag. The Club would be so much prouder."

"But my false position—no, I don't think I can—"

"You must," she insisted, gently. "They are so happy giving you this reception" (of course it was unnecessary to say anything of the scene over the expense of refreshments), "and they wouldn't be half so happy giving it for just Delia Dawson."

"It is just for you they are giving it, really," said Quag. "I shouldn't be here except for you."

"Of course not. If you hadn't met me you wouldn't ever have heard of Lake City." Mrs. Dawson was brisk, cheerful. The little man seemed nervous, frightened. With her it was always pleasant to try to reassure people.

"It's meant a great deal to me to feel that away out here there were people working at the same things I was working at."

Mrs. Dawson carelessly contrived to let her lace scarf fall over the *Handbook to Victorian Poetry* which lay on the table.

"Oh, yes," she assented, a little nervously, "the ladies certainly are devoted—yes, devoted to Chaldea."

"It's wonderful!" exclaimed Mr. Quag.

"Yes, wonderful," echoed his friend, a little doubtfully.

"It has helped my work."

"That's something we can be proud of," exclaimed Mrs. Dawson, heartily. "I want you to know how much we appreciate all you've done for us, above all, this coming here now. I can't tell you how glad I personally am to see you again."

"Are you?" he asked, eagerly. The conversation, thus recorded, is commonplace, even dull. Yet in this instant Mr. Quag's eyes were lit with a light that had never been there before. Whatever little remnant of romance and emotion Providence had assigned to him now seemed on the point of trembling into life. Whatever little chance he had for a comradeship that should go down the hill with him he had almost screwed his courage to the point of trying to take.

"Are you glad?" he repeated.

"Yes, very," replied Mrs. Dawson, and she looked at him a little curiously. Did she in that moment feel the brush of strange wings, did she feel the air heavy with any possibilities, did she see in the little gray bent man before her anything that had not been there eighteen months before? If she did, she gave no outward sign, except that she put her hand a moment on his arm.

"I'm proud, Mr. Quag, that you're my friend. I'm proud that you have wanted to visit me in my country."

She rose, and he with her.

"It was so little to do," he answered. "So little to do."

Just one-half second more there was, one-half second of golden light over the world. Then Mr. Quag heard a voice making its way through these radiant, confusing clouds which had surrounded him.

It was a gentleman named James Fitzroy who had just come in and been introduced to the distinguished foreigner.

"I'm mighty glad to meet you, sir. Mrs. Dawson has told me a lot about you."

Mr. Quag murmured thanks. The intruder was well set up, full-blooded, cheerful, competent, prosperous, and by no means cultivated—all this one saw at a glance. He was the male Middle West, as triumphantly alive as was his female counterpart, Mrs. Dawson. Suddenly Mr. Quag felt nervous, uncertain, self-distrustful, out of place.

"I hope you will be in London in June," continued Mr. Fitzroy. "We are going over then."

He looked at Mrs. Dawson.

"I hadn't told him, Jim—" She was blushing ever so little.

"Yes, it's to be in June," shouted Mr. Fitzroy, cheerfully. "And she's going to show me 'dear old Lunnnon.'"

Somehow Mr. Quag found Mr. Fitzroy's hand.

"I—I congratulate you upon—upon the greatest possible good fortune in the world. Yes—yes, you must certainly come to see me at the Museum. I shall be always there—always there now."

And he is always there now. A little older, a little grayer every year. A little more pedantic, a little more hidebound, a little snuffier. You would not guess he had been to Lake City, Wisconsin. And indeed he is really more and more thrown back upon Chaldea.

Spring-Time

SPRING-TIME

HALF-WAY up the hillside young Michael Aloysius Carter stopped and looked down the little valley, green with the new grass and starry with frail white flowers. Across the small stream a flock of sheep slowly made their way up into the afternoon sunlight. They, with their shepherd in his rough sheepskin breeches and the boy's nine companions in their black cassocks, were the only living things to be seen.

Yet, just over the crest of the desolate green hill, with its dark pits in the tufa rock, one could see, almost frighteningly near, the huge statues that crown the church of St. John the Lateran, and still more to the left in the distance a long brown stretch of the great Aurelian Wall. It was the astonishing effect which only the Roman Campagna can produce, of almost primeval loneliness, yet with the overpowering sense fluttering close by of the long pageant of Rome's history.

Under the hill where he had left his fellow students there was a ruinous fountain, now covered with moss and trembling ferns, where under broken arches which had once made a pleasant cool grotto for her in some far-back Imperial days, a disconsolate marble nymph still sadly poured forth a trickling stream of water from a shell grasped in the one poor hand that was

left her. On the hill crest above him was what had once been a temple consecrated to her worship, later made sacred to some now forgotten saint, and at last, in a country where there are pathetically so far too many churches, disused, except as a kind of farmhouse, a little-frequented *osteria*, where wanderers outside the Roman walls occasionally ask for a cup of wine and a slice of rough bread.

To this neglected shrine, of which he had caught a glimpse, gleaming golden brown through the trees, young Carter had insisted on climbing. His companions had declared against the visit. He should have submitted to the will of the majority;—they are well-organized little democracies, these little companies of students for holy orders. His being on this daisy-covered hillside was in itself a breach of discipline, and for him an unusual one. When he had first come to the college, three years before this, it had seemed to him almost unbearable that he, Mike Carter, used to the freedom of an American town, should now always walk out with nine other boys, like a pack of silly schoolgirls in a line. But the feeling had passed quickly. He had grown philosopher enough to see that if he was one day to be Father Michael, and to make the sacrifice of his whole life for that higher good he dreamed of, it was but useless vexing of the spirit to ask the reasons for such trifling discipline and restrictions. It had been pleasant to go forth with his nine friends, when the morning's study was over, to the study of that wonderful thing that Rome had been and still was.

Now that his last year had come, Michael found

himself freshly eager. Coming back was problematical at best. In a small Western town and a little church it was probable that he would live out his life. There in America were the duties, the hard facts, of the career he had taken up. Here in the Holy City was its poetry, its perpetual inspiration. Here he had got once and for all time, so it seemed to him, such a feeling of the great splendid march of the Church down the ages as could never be forgotten, no matter how remote and detached from its central fount he might be placed. Rome had cast a spell upon him which wakened the imagination and stirred the emotions.

Did she not perhaps stir the emotions too much? It had of late been with some confusion of spirit, almost with fear, that he had come to realize how pagan and imperial Rome had seemed at times almost to obliterate the medieval and Christian city. At moments he no longer thought of those earlier times merely as the days which the noble company of martyrs had made illustrious. To-day, by the green grotto of this rustic goddess, he forgot his sober, black-gowned companions, and filled the little valley with a spring-time festival of the dead pagan days. He could see a happy band of revelers come along the winding road, waving pink branches of the flowery almond-tree, singing songs to all the gods there were of spring and youth and pleasure. Rome again cast her magic spell, and the boy felt, so vividly that it was almost with a pang, how all through her long rich centuries she had with a lavish imperial hand offered life in a thousand romantic and highly colored forms,

It was not so much that he felt that, since he was to be Father Michael some day, he was renouncing life and its pageants, as that he, like every boy on some spring day when a warm perfumed breeze blows along some green hillside, felt a strange suffocating pleasure that was half pain in the sudden revelation of how the world was so rich with beauty and emotion that no one could ever hope to grasp even the half of it. So far from temptation had he kept himself, with such a fiery young passion for purity and righteousness had he tried to restrain even his inmost thoughts, that now, when his head seemed to swim a little with the heat, when his daily routine of studies and devotions seemed somehow to fade to unreality, when there seemed to be about him a kind of shimmering, elusive vision of unknown pleasures, untasted raptures, even now he could not have defined with precision any desires which stirred him, any lures with which the devil had beset his path. Yet, while the saints beckoned to him from the high façade of the great church of St. John, around him, invisible and stealthy, from all the brown ruins where they had lived, from the very green earth where they had once walked and had now slept through the centuries, crowded the rustic deities of pagan Rome, no longer frightened away by his black cassock nor by the cross that lay upon his breast. He saw nothing, however, when he came over the crest of the hill but the brown temple and the slender figure of a girl, standing in an attitude of expectation, almost alarm. She was without a hat, and, perhaps because the sun shone so

brightly on it, the first thing that Michael Aloysius noticed was the golden halo of her hair.

She started towards him, alarmed no longer, but still confused.

"*Lei parla*, you speak," she began, haltingly, and then stopped, looking quickly up and down the cassock faced with blue and the red sash.

"Oh, you are—yes, you *are* American, aren't you?"

"Yes," answered young Michael Aloysius.

"I'm so glad; that horrid red Baedeker's done me some good at last. I read about the colors of the robes in him." She spoke with an air of gayety, but there was still something of trembling nervousness about her, and the boy remembered the look of fright in her eyes when he had first come. Now she took a step nearer. She was dressed in gray with a great deal of white, and there were pink and purple flowers in the hat she carried in her hand.

"You're going back to Rome, aren't you?" she asked, and then, without waiting for an answer, "you'll let me come with you?"

Michael Aloysius flushed a little.

"I have to go back with the other fellows," he answered. "I've got to hurry to catch up with them."

The girl began to put on her hat, impatiently struggling with the golden hair that would not sit gracefully in its place.

"I'll hurry too," she said—"run if necessary. Oh, you don't understand. I'm alone here. I've been here almost all day. The cabman was to come back for me at five, but he hasn't, and so I was alone here with

no man but Beppino, who's ten, and his aunt, who is sixty, and has the fever, and his mother, who keeps the *osteria*, and said it would be *molto pericoloso* for me to walk back alone. I suppose I could have stayed here the night, but then my own mother would have almost died of fright, I think. Oh, you don't know what a relief you were. I *was* frightened. It's all lovely"—and she made a gesture towards the rolling green Campagna—"but it is *so* lonely."

For an instant she was silent, she and Michael Aloysius too. They both seemed to drink in afresh the beauty of the desolate landscape, across which the long shadows from the declining sun were now creeping, already making the grove below them where the nymph had lived a dark patch upon the paler green of the turf. Then they both suddenly roused themselves.

"I must say good-by to *la mamma* and *la zia* and Beppino," she said, and an instant afterwards she had fetched from around the corner two yellow and fever-stricken crones and a pretty boy. She pressed their hands, and in Beppino's she left some money.

"I gave them three francs because they had been so good to me. Was that enough?" she asked.

"Too much; unless you wanted to be reckless with your money."

"Oh, I want to be reckless sometimes, but not with money." Her face clouded. "No, not with that. But they were dears." She brightened again. "And I thought my life was in their hands, until you came."

A cloud of blessings followed them as they started down the hill, and then for a minute or so they went silently down the path, the girl ahead, the boy in the

black cassock behind. On the road below that led back to the city's gate his nine companions had already vanished from sight. What would they say to his appearance now? They would be sensible, of course; and there was no harm, either, in doing one's duty, even when it presented itself in a new form. But boys are boys, even in the blackest cassocks. It was inevitable that this adventure of Michael's should be laughed about. Suddenly it came over him how he would hate it that even discreet priestly jokes should be made about this pretty, gay, friendly, sweet creature whom chance had put for a little while into his charge.

"I can go faster, I think, if you want to catch up with your friends. I don't—I don't want to be any more trouble to you than I have to be."

In answer to this, Michael Aloysius merely slackened his pace.

"No," he said, hastily. "We won't hurry. It doesn't matter about catching the others. Of course I must see that you get safely back."

They went on again in silence. He did not look at his companion, though she stole a glance at him when the path widened and they went side by side.

"I suppose you think I'm awfully foolish to be out here alone," she said at last.

He answered gravely, "It was unwise, at least, wasn't it?" That was quite as the Father Michael that was to be would be sure to say it. But then, oddly enough, young Michael, who was not yet a priest, looked at her and laughed. "I'm sure I don't know," he went on, more lightly. "I suppose you had your reasons,"

"Oh, of course I was stupid to trust the cabman, because the Campagna might be really dangerous for a girl alone, I know. But I *had* to come somewhere by myself to think." She was not speaking lightly now. "I just *had* to be alone for hours and hours. Don't you think you have to, to think out the problems of your life?"

"Silence and meditation are wonderful," replied the second of these young philosophers.

"Sometimes talking it over with a friend is worth while perhaps. You can think better when you talk, I believe. And I suppose advice is some good. But when you're so far away from home there isn't any one. I feel so alone—"

"You're not traveling all alone, are you?" asked Michael, looking in surprise at the slender figure by his side. "I don't think you ought—"

"No, I'm with my mother," she hesitated, "but mother's advice is just what I don't want to take, though I suppose perhaps I shall unless there's some one to tell me I'm right not to."

"Oh!" said Michael.

"I'm only eighteen," she broke out, "and I just don't know anything! Life doesn't seem to me very easy. Decisions are awful."

Michael deliberated. Michael perhaps thought he was being very wise.

"You're not a Catholic, then?" he asked at last.

"No. Why?"

"Only, that advice is what one's confessor can give one."

"Oh, the confessional—" began the girl.

"It isn't what you Protestants think it," the boy broke in with, hurriedly. "It isn't merely that you have to confess your sins there. It is that you can get comfort, help, advice there. Oh, if you only knew!"

"I—I know a little, I think," was the answer. Then came a question. "Did you ever read Hawthorne's *Marble Faun*?"

"Yes—a long time ago."

"Do you remember the part when Hilda just *had* to tell some one, and she confessed in St. Peter's, though she was a Protestant?"

"Yes."

"I went to St. Peter's yesterday afternoon, and I wondered whether I could ever do such a thing."

"Hilda had no right to do what she did."

"Well," answered the girl, "I didn't do it. Besides, I don't believe one of those old gray priests would have understood anyhow."

"Priests are wonderful, and very wise," said Michael.

"Yes, but Hilda was different, after all. She had an awful secret on her conscience."

"Well, I'm glad you haven't," broke out Michael. "It wouldn't seem right. You're so young and—" He went no farther, for suddenly and inexplicably he grew shy.

"No," went on the girl. "It is just the selfish problem of my own life that's troubling me—" She stopped suddenly and then began again. "I don't know why I should be talking to you about my private affairs so. Tell me about Rome and your life instead. What a

privilege you have! You're here two or three years, aren't you?"

Michael's answer was not very direct. "I'd like to help you," was all he said.

The road took them across the stream by a little bridge just here. The girl stopped, and leaning on the hand-rail, looked at the green slopes opposite meditatively.

"You're going to be a priest some day, aren't you? But until then it wouldn't be wrong for a Protestant to talk to you."

"You could just think that I'm a friend, couldn't you?"

"I don't know." She sounded unconvinced, yet she went on: "This is what it is. It's my getting married. Mother wants me to marry some one I don't want to."

"An Italian with a title?"

"No! I wish to goodness it were as romantic and as like a book as that. I'm not an heiress. We're poor. We had a hard time getting enough together to make this trip. No; it's only Jim Brewster, of Rochester. I've known him all my life. He's nice and he's pretty rich—for Rochester. But he's old, about thirty-five at least, and—well, I'm not in the least in love with him and never shall be. And now he's come to Rome, and it's just spoiling it for me."

"Is there any one else that you—that you care for?" questioned her companion, hesitatingly.

"No. It just won't be like a problem in a book or a play. There isn't any one. Jim says I'll come to love him in time."

"Well, perhaps you will." Michael spoke without enthusiastic conviction, one would have said.

"Oh, I don't suppose you'd understand," she cried, impatiently. Then: "Yet I don't see why you shouldn't, even if some day you are to be a priest. Of course you look like a priest—that's the reason I can talk to you."

It was true that Michael Aloysius in his black cassock looked like a priest, but he looked like a handsome boy as well, with black wavy hair, a clear color in his cheeks and in his deep-blue Irish eyes.

"I couldn't tell any other man about it—it wouldn't be nice. It seems to me—no, I don't believe I can."

"Please go on," begged her companion.

She blushed a deep pink and nervously quickened her pace as she began to talk again: "I don't doubt that Jim Brewster would make a kind, good husband. But it seems to me that if I wait, the right man will come along, that I'll love him, and that he'll love me, and that we'll be married and live happily ever afterwards. Perhaps it's being only eighteen and sentimental and silly—mother says it is—but it seems to me it is my duty to wait."

She stopped for a minute by a bank covered with pale purple flowers and began picking some of them.

"Do you believe in love?" she asked, without turning.

"Why, yes, of course," came the answer, after a moment.

"I didn't know," said the girl, in a low voice. "I thought perhaps priests—"

"We're just like other men"—Michael was speaking

a little faster—"only—only"—his pace slackened—"we've decided to be different."

"Yes, I see," answered the girl, and she turned and looked at him with a grave, sweet, solemn gaze. "I see. That's what makes it so wonderful that I should meet you just now and talk to you. Because you're young yourself—how old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"Yes, so you understand. May I talk to you a little more?" she asked, gently. "We'll walk on, so that I won't make you too late."

"Yes, go on talking."

"Mother says love comes from just seeing people a good deal, and coming to like and respect them, and finding your tastes are alike. I say that I believe it just comes. I say that I believe in love at first sight. Mother says *she* doesn't believe in miracles."

"*We* believe in miracles in my church," said young Michael. "I believe," he went on after a minute, "that you could go out on a day like this when it was spring-like, and some young man would see you, and, just suddenly, because you were pretty and you had golden hair and a gray dress with lots of fluffy white stuff and a hat with flowers on it the color of the almond blossoms, would know that he loved you and that you were good and that he'd like to be always with you."

Michael stopped. This speech had tumbled out so fast that he was almost out of breath. Had his companion turned, she would have seen that he was looking at her with eyes that shone because they were a little wet with tears. Again the boy was feeling the wonderful sense that had come to him before that day

—a sense that hurt even as it gave joy—of how rich the world was. He was understanding life, its humanity, its pleasures, its sorrows, so he told himself. Suddenly his whole horizon had widened. He had grown up, he had come to be wise at last. He felt that the spring afternoon with its visions of old pagan festivals, with this new close touch with the life of to-day, this pilgrimage of his to the obscure shrine on the hilltop, successively dedicated to the Divinity as man had known it, this talk in the sunset, had made him tremble with all the emotions of all the world. And the world was changed. In some new strange way power had come to him. He seemed to be able to open his arms and embrace the universe. Some such tumultuous, intoxicating, bewildering confusion of thoughts surged in the boy. But he only kept looking at the slender gray figure going down the green valley by his side, and he said:

“That’s what could happen, I believe.”

“That’s what I dream could happen, too,” she said, but it never occurred to her to look at Michael. “And that the same miracle would happen to me, and that then I’d be really good and nice—as you said—which I’m not now, and that he and I would be always happy, and there wouldn’t be any awful problems in life as there are now. Am I a sentimental fool?” She turned to him now. “Ought I to marry Jim Brewster?”

“No,” said Michael, firmly,—“no. I’m sure it would be wrong. I think your duty is to wait for the miracle.”

“And will it come?”

"It's sure to come."

"And I'm right in believing that it's the greatest thing in the world?"

"You're right in believing it's the greatest thing in the world." The boy spoke solemnly, his eyes shining.

The road had led them now to the long stretch of the walls, and before them towered the ruinous gate through which they were to go back to Rome, and to life as they had left it earlier in the day.

"Can we stop just a minute or so?" asked the girl. "Inside I'm sure that there'll be cabs and your friends waiting for you. I feel that out here where we can see the Campagna and the mountains is where I'd like to say good-by to you. Or"—she hesitated—"will I see you again in Rome?"

"No; they don't allow us to go to see any one, scarcely even our relatives."

"Then it's good-by always. You'll never be in Rochester?"

"Probably not."

"Then perhaps I'll never again see you in all my life."

"Perhaps not," assented Michael.

"It's so strange," the girl went on, and Michael saw her eyes grow dim and a little wet. "Then I must thank you now. You'll never know what you've done for me to-day. I knew what I ought to do, but it was hard to do it all alone. You've given me strength and courage. You've just changed the whole of my life. And now we've got to say good-by and never see each other again in all the world."

She held out a hand and Michael took it.

"My name is Elsie Canning," she said. "If by any chance you should ever hear of me again, I want to think that you'll remember me and know that I sha'n't ever forget and that I shall be always grateful."

"My name is Michael Aloysius Carter," said the boy, with her hand still in his, "and I sha'n't ever forget."

The girl looked at the red west, and then she spoke again.

"If there were only something that I could do for you. You know," she went on, with a frightened air, "I don't quite understand you. If I offend you by anything I say, I don't mean to. It's only because I'm a Protestant. If you say that love and marriage and happiness are the greatest things in the world, how can you—how—" She did not at first finish the sentence, but only looked at the black cassock and the black hat. "How can you give them up? And how can you know? Are you like me, do you just dream? Or have you been in love?"

"Yes," said Michael, speaking solemnly, "I have been in love. Don't you see," he went on, almost passionately,—“don't you see that just because it's the greatest thing in the world, that it's the greatest thing in the world to give it up for God and to be His priest? Don't you see that renunciation means renouncing some precious thing? Don't you see that until you know what your life might be in the world you can't offer it as a sacrifice? Don't you see that it's a kind of fire that one could come through and be sanctified?

Don't you see that just because I'm young I must give up love?"

His young head was lifted and in his eyes there was a strange light. The girl looked at him with a confused sense that here in this wonderful magic Rome she stood for an instant by the side of some beautiful young saint, such as she had seen in the painted imaginings of a medieval artist.

"Yes," she said, softly, "I think perhaps I see that for you it's right. I hope you'll always be good and happy and all you want to be, and I'll pray for you sometimes. Do you think—will you mind? Can I help that way?"

"You have helped," answered Michael, turning to her. "You have been like a vision that was sure to come once in my life, so that I could say good-by to it for God's sake. It will never come again after I say good-by to you. Do you understand?"

Her eyes were fixed on him, and at first they were frightened and surprised; then slowly they grew soft.

"Yes, I think so," she murmured.

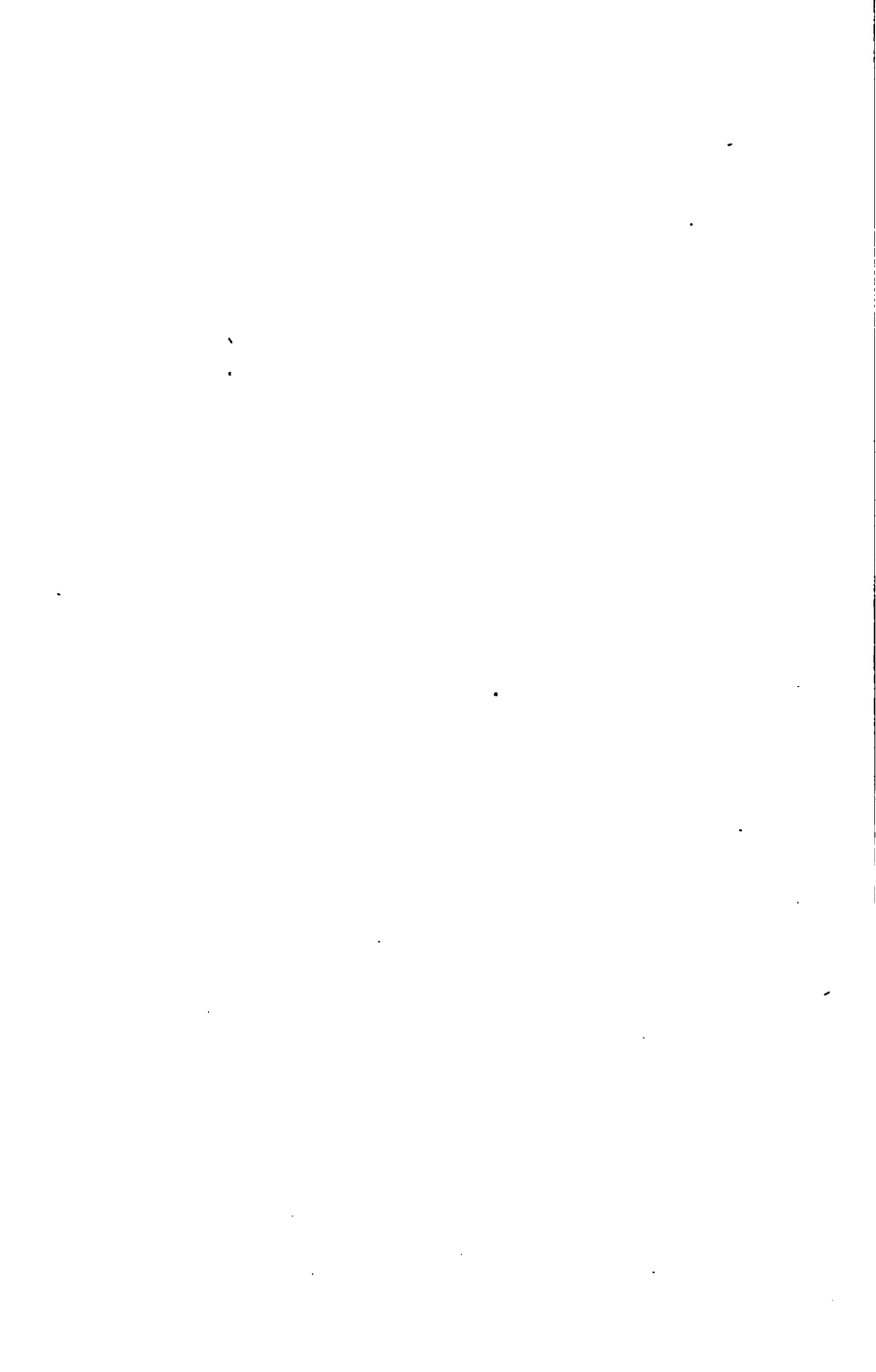
For one second she swayed towards him the smallest trifle, as though some little puff of wind from up the green valley where were the nymph's grotto and her temple had bent her before it. If it had been any one else in the world who was there except Michael Aloysius who was some day to be Father Michael, he would have kissed her. As it was, her golden head only drooped as in a low voice she said:

"Good-by."

Then Michael also said:

"Good-by."

With that they went through the great gate with its towers into Rome and back to life as they had left it earlier—no, not quite, for either one of them, as it had been before.



Vive l'Amerique!

VIVE L'AMERIQUE!

THE small *rotisserie* of the *Faisan d'Or* still exists and, I hope, is prospering. I passed up Sixth Avenue the other day and through the well-polished window I saw the same fair show as of old of fat chickens turning on the spit before a bright coal fire. But the white-capped chef who watched them was not Henri; the waiter I saw ushering a patron to a tiny table was not the suave André; the proprietor, of whom I caught a fleeting glimpse, was not my old friend Picard; above all, that plump middle-aged lady who presided majestically at the desk was not pretty little Madame Picard who once sat there. Ah, well, when one has memories it is perhaps as well to rest content with them! It was lunch time, but I passed on to a larger and more pretentious establishment where I got—as I knew I should—a dearer and a tougher chicken. Over this wretched fowl, however, I meditated, and it seems to me that it can do no harm now to tell something of the story of the early days of The Golden Pheasant. Five years have gone by, and I somehow feel sure that the Picards, wherever they may be, are happy. It is unlikely that they will ever read these pages; if they do I think perhaps they may be glad—in those vague regions into which amiable waiters and lovely *dames du comptoir* and the snows of yester-year disappear—to receive my

friendliest greetings and the assurance of my most distinguished consideration.

It was quite by chance that I was the actual first consumer of roast chicken in the *Faisan d'Or*. The reader may be assured that it is not my custom to lurk in Sixth Avenue, waiting to rush in at the doors of any new restaurants which may be opened. Nor is it ordinarily my pleasure to eat solitary dinners. But on this hot September evening fate judged it wise to send me forth alone and to dazzle my eye by the sight of those fair chickens turning on their spit. I went in and the pleasant bustle which greeted my entrance seemed a far friendlier welcome—as indeed it naturally was under the special circumstances—than is given to the ordinary diner in the ordinary restaurant. When the proprietor, bending politely from the waist at my table's side, informed me that my patronage was the first which honored him, it somehow came over me at once that my presence in the *Faisan d'Or*, at the dinner hour had already become—if I may venture upon the word—traditional. Long before I went away that evening I had stuffed my pockets full of the establishment's advertising cards, and had rashly promised to sow them broadcast among an acquaintance which was, I asserted, notoriously chicken-hungry.

I must be honest, this was not all unselfish interest in a new business enterprise. There had been from both Monsieur Picard and the suave André the most barefaced flattery on the subject of my mastery of the French tongue, a form of flattery before which—I may as well confess my utter foolishness—I always capitulate immediately and completely. There had been a

smile (also a mere flattery doubtless) from Madame Picard at her *comptoir*, and there had been the chicken—here at least we are on solid ground. It was incredible, so hot, so tender, so done to just the right turn, so redolent somehow of all one's blessed memories of Paris and of France. I could become lyric about it. As a matter of fact I *did* become lyric about it; and collectors of my works—ah, if one could only hope that such fond and deluded creatures existed!—would do well to secure a small folder which a few weeks later was printed advertising The Golden Pheasant. It is, though unsigned, an excellent example of what I should term my middle style. And it contains a philosophic passage on the safeguard it is to the public to see its fowls roasting, as it were, in the open, which I believe might have pleased Brillat-Savarin himself. But I have perhaps said enough to make it plain how in that *rotisserie* I was soon, as the French would say, like a fish in water.

Gaston Picard was an excellent fellow—and voluble. What little history of his there was to know I soon knew. He was short, forty-three, slightly bald, a little grizzled at the temples. He had been most of his life as he, a trifle vaguely, put it, *dans le commerce* at Tours. (I take that to mean that he had been an underpaid clerk in a wholesale wine merchant's.) Two years before this period he had suddenly inherited from an uncle in Perigueux, a slice of a fortune made there in potting pigeons with goose livers and truffles. With 20,000 francs, a round \$4,000, it is evident that my friend was a *parti*. It was just this I could imagine, that gave him courage to propose to Madame

Le Tellier of Vouvray-sur-Loire, marriage with her daughter Lucie.

"I could at least offer her a comfortable life," he told me. And he added, with no apparent thought of being especially frank, "I offered her, too, my affections. But as for those I had never been much of a success with women. I was over forty. I was—well, what I am. She was twenty; she was—well, without seeing her with my lover's eyes, what she is, *une très jolie femme*."

That little Madame Lucie was indeed *une très jolie femme*, a very lovely woman, I was quite inclined to agree. It may, I suppose, as well be admitted here at once that I was probably the least little bit in love with her myself, and that if she had turned those great brown eyes in my direction or smiled at me a few times oftener, I should have been completely so. But it never happened. So this is not at all my story, only the Picards'—and the suave André's.

I think too well of that Mademoiselle Lucie Le Tellier, who dwelt at Vouvray, where the blue Loire slips by over great sandy shallows, to believe that she did not think fairly well of Monsieur Gaston Picard who aspired to her hand. Need we inquire too deeply into the matter? She was a well brought up *jeune fille*. Her mother approved the match. And—may one say so?—even outside of France love sometimes comes after marriage, not before it. I do not say that little Mademoiselle Lucie was exactly in love when she married. But she liked Monsieur Picard. And in any case there are other interesting and remarkable things which must be immediately told about her.

It was owing to her ambition, to her sense of the opportunity which came with 20,000 francs, that the Picards found themselves in this strange America, which Madame Picard, in a fine flight of the imagination, had invented—out of the whole cloth, if one may put it that way, for none of the inhabitants of her peaceful native village of Vouvray had ever adventured so far. It was fantastic that they should be in Sixth Avenue. And yet, was it not like New York? Our great metropolis is the gateway of Europe, and one of the kindest of her myriad activities is to welcome the foreigner, to teach him something of our ideals and our ways, and then if he wishes to fare farther, to speed him on his westward way. The little Picards were really Americans of the Americans; their story, foreign in tone if you like, is really racy of the very soil of Manhattan.

At first Monsieur Picard, with some solemnity and a due sense of what it must mean to New York to have French capital seeking investment here, approached several French importing houses with a view of "placing his funds" as he termed it. They considered the matter, so Picard said. But consideration seems to have been a long process. And in the end they laughed in his face when he, urged by Lucie (at home in the dingy boarding-house) to stand firm, talked of a partnership. There was already a slight shrinkage of those famous "funds" caused by the expense of even dingy *pension* life. There was a still greater shrinkage in the very fact, which now came home to them, that 20,000 francs, a tidy fortune at Vouvray on the blue Loire, was only \$4,000 in New

York, a nothing in this whirlpool. Lucie still held her head high and talked of her husband's affairs down-town, but Gaston, bowing a little to the inevitable, began to give a few French lessons to fellow boarders. Duty to keep the "funds" intact became now a sacred thing. They *must* be so placed as to insure his future, above all Lucie's. He had promised her a future; if he could not keep his word what had he, a tired, plain little man, twenty years her elder, to offer her?

Then one day they were in Sixth Avenue, and were delayed beyond the hour of *déjeuner* at the *pension*. They lunched at the *Rotisserie des Parisiens*, kept, paradoxically enough, by an Irishman named Monaghan—a real New York touch, this. Lucie, who had the manners of a lady not at all accustomed to eating in cheap public places of resort, complained to her husband and in fairly firm terms to the waiter of the original poor quality of the chicken she was eating and of the unfortunate character of the roasting to which the animal had later been subjected. The waiter—it is the first appearance in our story of the suave André—ventured upon a slightly caustic comment on Mr. Monaghan's nationality. Lucie very elegantly shrugged her shoulders and enunciated a general truth, which came to her that instant with the force of divine revelation.

"It is only the inhabitants of Touraine," she said, "who can roast a chicken."

Then, recounts Gaston, he and Lucie suddenly looked each other in the eye. The thought had come like lightning, the *coup de foudre*. Gaston could keep the

books; had he not done that—*dans le commerce*, at Tours? Lucie could do the buying; had she not, looking adorable, done that with her mother at Vouvray, at the pretty market by the river's edge?

"It was, we saw at once," explained Picard, "a business which required no experience whatever." A chef could easily be found and Lucie already knew a shop in Seventh Avenue where they could buy his cap and apron. As to waiters, Gaston observed that Mr. Monaghan's chief helper seemed "a person already not indisposed to better himself elsewhere." So from the very first moment the fortunes of The Golden Pheasant were for good or evil, linked to those of the suave André.

I never liked that admirable head-waiter, the suave André. But I had to admit his excellence. It was he who seated the patrons with an air which would have done more than credit to the most expensive restaurant in Fifth Avenue, although we were in Sixth and charged "only a quarter for roast chicken and fried" (I say "we" to symbolize my general interest). It was André, bending tenderly over them and artfully inducing them to order extra dishes they never meant to eat, who, nevertheless, with his honeyed smile caught and held the patronage of the elderly ladies from the small hotels round the corner. It was he who conversed with the young ladies somewhat loosely connected with the stage, with the cosmopolitan air of one to whom Broadway was as his native boulevards, and a pretty woman was everywhere and always a pretty woman. He was indeed a fellow, who as Gaston Picard put it, "could not have

failed to have had no bad amount of success with the fair sex." For this quality Picard, who himself confessed to having had very little of such success, admired André. I, who have doubtless had quite as little as Picard—though I don't know that I confess it—did not somehow admire André for his prowess;—there's the Anglo-Saxon of it. And I admired him less, when, from my corner, I fancied I saw an even tenderer glance in his eye, caught an even more honeyed note in his voice when he approached the desk and the lady who sat behind it. Then one day André, conversing confidentially with me (not from any personal liking, but because it was by way of being the *mode* in The Golden Pheasant to treat me like an old habitué), said with an enormous air of man of the world, that "*la patronne* was a pretty woman, quite Parisian, who must be sufficiently well sick of an old provincial bore of a husband!" I remembered little "provincial" Picard's admiration of the "Parisian" polish of his head-waiter. "I have the honor, •André," I said, "to count both Madame *and* Monsieur Picard among my friends."

And from that moment I felt myself on guard.

There was absolutely no harm in little Madame Lucie. I could have sworn it then on faith; later, when the crisis of her life brought her for a moment nearer me, I could have staked my own honor on it. Yet I could not deny that there were danger signals. There was a little flush in her cheeks sometimes when André spoke to her. And what was worse, there was an irritable note in her voice sometimes when her

husband had, I supposed, seemed more than usually stupid, and middle-aged, and bald.

Let us do the matter justice. Picard was the most loyal, loving and devoted of stupid, middle-aged, bald husbands—but he *was* all these latter things. Be honest, ladies who may read this story, you happy and faithful wives, confess it, is there not, beyond married love, a thing called romance, a will-o'-the-wisp that flickered on your girlhood's horizon and even later, even now, sometimes lights up with its pale flame the regions of what might have been but now may never be? Does the Prince never ride by these days to be followed for one instant by your eyes? Yes, I know he never reins in his horse, I know that you would not speak to him even if he should. But he is handsome, you will admit that; his dark eyes could flash fire. He is Romance. He looks, I maintain, a good deal like the suave André.

Curse the fellow, he knew how to make love to women! Did little Madame Lucie know how to resist such love-making? This was the question I kept putting to myself, and it, quite as much as the establishment's admirable *cuisine*, brought me nightly to The Golden Pheasant. Then events, quickly enough, took from me both the question and the roast chicken. I must hurry on to the evening when I heard of Picard's illness.

Madame Lucie stood by her desk instead of sitting comfortably behind it. She was pale, and she had on a black hat with red roses. I remembered her trimming it behind her *comptoir* three evenings earlier; I

had thought its flowers were for the suave André. I thought of it, now, ashamed, as she came across to me, and told me, as one might an old friend, of Gaston's illness. It was sudden, it was severe, it was pneumonia, in fact. She was hurrying back to his bedside.

"And our little Pheasant?" I asked.

"I leave that in André's hands," she answered. "He is a good fellow, he is a friend.

"It is hard," she went on, "to leave it now when it begins to march, when there is chance that success will come. Here," she went on—and with a small, neat gesture she indicated the little *rotisserie*, the scant tables, the small coal fire, the few fat chickens—"here is everything I have, all my future. But I must leave it now in trust to André." She turned away and for an instant looked at him across the room. Then back to me. "And I leave it to you, too, Monsieur." There was a little trembling smile that had tears behind it, I could guess, and then almost before I realized it she had gone.

As to how I maintained the trust put in me the less said the better; I am not proud of myself. That very night a telegram came calling me to Washington. Not everything I had was involved, not all my future. Yet the thing was in its way urgent, and I told myself it would be mere Quixotic folly to stay in New York just to dine at The Pheasant each night, and to add forty-five cents to its takings in. Altogether I passed a half hour of painful and silly indecision before I finally laughed myself out of any idea of not going away. The next morning I telephoned to Evan Davis,

best of doctors and kindest of friends, to look in on Picard for me and see that he was getting some adequate care. Then I called my taxicab and for a week dismissed Pheasants, golden or otherwise, from my mind. It struck me afterwards as ironic of fate to make my week so tranquil, to allow me so instinctively to feel that all was going well in New York.

Even the first night I was back I dined with a party at the newest and most extravagant hotel. The day following I had to lunch, on business, with some wretched editor. It was not till the evening that I made my way to Sixth Avenue.

Even through the window I saw the change. An unknown capless chef stood by the turning chickens. Entering I saw two strange waiters idling in an unkempt stale-smelling room. There was no one behind the *comptoir*, there was no suave André. There were by the dirty little tables almost no customers. At this rate there was no "future." I felt as if I had a sudden blow in the face. They must have thought me an odd creature. I sat down in the first chair by the door and I launched an inquiry at the whole room.

"*Qu'est-ce qui se passe ici?* What's happening here, in heaven's name?" I called out.

A well-meaning stupid Roumanian waiter who had little French or English, tried to answer my questions. He and the others had only been there two days. The *patron*—yes, he was Monsieur André—would doubtless be in later. The *patron's* partner had been ill, they had heard that. They believed he was no worse, still alive at any rate. And would Monsieur favor them with his order.

I sat a little longer before a tough portion of some nameless animal, perhaps chicken, which I could willingly have watered with my tears. Then there entered the suave André, in the most dashing clothes and a red tie, the jauntiest smile, and all the air of being a conqueror of both worlds and women. For an instant I thought the jauntiness dropped at sight of me, but at once he was at my side, with the most polished air.

He feared that Monsieur had not been well served. He looked around the room and permitted himself the most elegant of shrugs. Yes, things had gone off a bit. Monsieur's illness, Madame's absence, his own need to attend to his own and Monsieur's outside affairs—all this had forced an appearance of neglect. He had found it necessary to dismiss the old staff, he had not yet had time to secure an adequate new one. One did what one could.

But, and here he flooded me and the room as it were with his most brilliant smile, to-morrow all would be changed. Monsieur Picard was to-night past the danger. To-morrow Madame would come back. He would resign his trust.

The news was so good that I forgot and momentarily forgave the squalor of the neglected Pheasant. I am afraid I shook André's hand, as I prepared to depart. I remembered afterwards that I saw him go towards the desk as if to close for the night, and that outside I encountered a lady, of Gallic extraction, some claims to beauty, but few, I should have said, to reputation, who might have been waiting for the suave

gentleman inside. *She* had pink roses in *her* hat, not red.

I was delayed the next evening and did not arrive in Sixth Avenue till late. But I had on a gay tie, and a flower in my button-hole, which I meant to offer to the *dame du comptoir* as I went away. I felt that it was, in its own small way, an evening of fête.

She stood by the *comptoir*, with eyes that looked blankly at me at first. She was white as death, and one long wisp of black hair lay across her cheek. On the floor at her side lay, forgotten, the hat with red roses. I went straight to her.

"Madame—" I cried, "your husband—?"

She turned and slowly seemed to recognize me. A poor little smile of welcome trembled on her face.

"He's all right," she said, "it's not him. It's André." And she turned away from me as if to hide the tears.

I took the blow ; it was that to me.

"Ill?" I asked, without much interest in my voice.

"Ill?" she cried, and she faced me. Thank God there was anger, not tears in her eyes now.

"Ill? No, gone, and with our money!"

The last customer had left, the frightened Roumanian waiters stood huddled in a little group near by listening while she told the tale afresh.

He had come to her for money for the rent a quarter in advance, for the past month's bills, the past week's wages. Neither rent, bills, nor wages had ever been paid. There had been a story of the range being broken, another day the pipes had burst. The

china had been smashed and must be replaced. Nothing of it all had been true. The last, the vilest, had been the day that Gaston had been despaired of. That day the suave André received secret information that the bank where the "funds" had been placed was shaky. Little Lucie, terrorized, had sent him with a check to withdraw her money and put it in another bank. He had fetched her back a bank book, with her deposit neatly entered. But unhappily the bank itself had not yet been organized. The night before—that was when I saw him—he had looted the cash-drawer. He had paid the little Roumanian waiter—the one called "Charlee"—his wages, and then borrowed them back plus "Charlee's" savings of the six months he had been in America. He had even carried away a roast chicken, neatly wrapped—that was for supper with the pink roses, I knew.

We closed The Golden Pheasant for the night and sent the second waiter, the one called Jim, to the police station with a note from me. And then we waited, little Madame Lucie and I.

After a fit of crying she came over to the little table where I was and seated herself across from me.

"The worst of it is," she said in a low, even voice, "that it is all my fault."

"Ah, no, Madame," I began to protest. But she stopped me.

"Let me say it to you, Monsieur. I can never say it to my husband, for he will be happier if he never knows. But I must say it to some one for just this one time. It is all my fault—my fault."

I saw her fists clenched passionately upon the table's top, but she made no noise.

"You must have seen, Monsieur, you who are a man of the world. Happily for my husband he is not a man of the world. You must have seen that that creature was making love to me."

"I thought I saw, Madame," I answered—gravely.

She drew herself up and a faint flush came into her cheeks.

"I ask you to believe, Monsieur, that I have remained an honest woman."

"I *do* believe you." I did; I knew it was God's truth.

"But I had already come to the point," she half whispered, "of asking myself whether I did not love him. I *did* not love him," she went on more vehemently, "I know that now. Are women all fools, Monsieur? You see how little doubt *he* had that I was one. I had what a woman needs for happiness; I was ready to throw it out through the window. I was ready to be his dupe, his tool. I was ready to trust him, as I did, with our future. Oh, if it had been mine only! If I could myself pay for my folly! But I make Gaston pay. I have robbed my husband of everything, everything!"

"Of everything except yourself," I ventured timidly.

She stood up, and somehow she had the air of taking a vow.

"Of everything except my love. It seems to me a poor, cheap thing now, but so long as he shall want it, it is his."

Just then the Roumanian Jim and the police came

in. There is not much more of the story to tell. They never found the suave André, nor the pink roses, nor the funds. But I am sure that somewhere he is still a waiter.

We managed to straighten out The Golden Pheasant's affairs and sell it. It took a little money of mine, rather more of Evan Davis's. We have both been repaid since. I know that three years ago the Picards were in Cincinnati and were prospering. Since then I have lost track. Oh, yes, the Roumanian Charlee was not out of pocket.

I thought the Picards would have liked to go back to France, to see the blue Loire slide past Tours over its sand-banks. But I did not know Madame Lucie.

"Let Gaston go back without me," she said gayly. (And he caught her hand and kissed it.) "I am here and here I stay. I am a man of business now. I am going West. And I must earn our 'funds,' win our future, get back what we lost. It is my duty."

On this speech of hers Monsieur Picard commented to me later.

"She calls herself man of business, Monsieur, and yet it is the most feminine of women. That is perhaps possible only in this country of yours. My wife and I were in accord, we were ready to work together, we were ambitious, yes, and we loved each other—all this when we left France. But now we are more ambitious, more ready to work together—and yes, we love each other more. I presume it to be in the air here. It is the land of the dollar, so we are ambitious. It is also the land of prudishness, all the French comic papers have said that, where no married woman may

look from the corner of her eye, where no married man has an evening out. *Eh, bien!* I am now an American, I accept that. Look at me, I am old, dull, bald—though Lucie means to get me a little wig. She is young, lovely, attractive to all men. Yet I somehow believe she loves me more than she ever would if we had stayed in France. Since we have been in America I have never had one moment's fear nor one moment's suspicion of my American wife. And this is a fact of which I do not complain. If that is what your country does, Monsieur, then I say *Vive l'Amérique!*"

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